THE MYSTERY OF BLACK EAGLE ISLAND

Christmas
1944

Merry Christmas
to
Billy
from
Aunt Peggy

THE MYSTERY OF BLACK EAGLE ISLAND

Mr. Willis Fuchs R
415 Golden St.
Calhan, CO 80808

by

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To

ISABELLE and HENRY

whose help and kindness made
the story possible

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The Mystery of Black Eagle Island

CHAPTER I

THE HALF DOZEN

"EVERYBODY present?" George Kimbell Ingram asked with a broad grin. George Kimbell Ingram did not usually grin, but it was his business to make other people grin. He was a cartoonist and the Half Dozen often posed for him. Sometimes he drew pictures that were not funny, but the funny ones brought the most money so there were more of them. Behind his great chair, on the library walls, hung a number of sketches—delightful, whimsical things—with G. K. I. scrawled in one corner. Near at hand, on a heavy table, a pair of bronze lions proudly pressed close to four leather-bound books and across the middle of each, in gold letters, was printed "by Florence Garrett Ingram" while between two strips of paneling was a long painting. The lady in the picture was tall and slender, her eyes were dreamy, her hair soft and fluffy about her face. The three initials were barely visible in the corner and underneath, on

a wee gold plate, was the one name " Florence." On the top of one of the lower book-shelves was a six-sided folding case, and six young faces peeped out from the silver frames. On the back of the case was engraved " The Half Dozen."

George Kimbell Ingram looked about him and began to count. " The Maxes, that's two; Bob, three; Caro, four; Francis, five; one missing—where is Nan? "

" Gone to fetch Osric," answered Francis, who was twelve, making room on the settee for Bargulus, his Boston Bull.

" Here we are, Dad," Nancy called cheerfully, lugging in a huge black cat. Nancy was going on eleven and felt quite grown up. She took a chair but Osric leaped to the top of one of the book-shelves where he could nap undisturbed if the meeting became either too heated or too dull.

George Kimbell Ingram scowled solemnly and made a great pretense of clearing his throat. Then he said: " I have a couple of things to present to the Half Dozen. You all know that Dr. Sully has said Mother must, absolutely must, have a rest and change. I've found just the right place for her, and I know some nice people who will rent the apartment for the summer and not make a wreck of it. Now, I am sorry to reiterate that camp for the Half Dozen is out of the question this year, so we must get a substitute decided upon quickly. Aunt Phœbe

Ingram has invited you to go to her house. Other provisions will have to be made for Bargulus and ——"

"Bow-wow-wow," interrupted Bargulus, throwing back his head in protest.

"Hush, dear, Dad hasn't finished," whispered Maxine, stroking the dog's head. Maxine was the younger of the Maxes by fifteen minutes.

"Then," went on Father, "here is a letter from my old friend, Lawrence Nelson. He writes:

"'DEAR GEORGE:

I'm sorry to hear the wife is having such a tussle and I am glad that you have a good place for her to recuperate. How would you like to send the Half Dozen to Black Eagle Island? There is plenty of fresh air, water and room. My family wants to go abroad so you can use the place all summer. If you want it, give me a ring and I will have the Oakleys open the old house for you.

Best wishes to yourself & Co.

NELSON.'"

"I may add that 'Old Ironsides,' otherwise Jane Menkler, agrees to go with you to the Island in her usual capacity as cook and housekeeper. Meeting's now open for discussion." Dad put down the letter and met six pairs of eyes.

"We are a great trial to Aunt Phœbe!" Car-

rol reminded him solemnly. Carrol was nine and a little lame.

"Very true. As a boy I was a great trial to her and you children are not an improvement on me. Besides there are six times as many of you," her father admitted gravely.

"Boarding Bargulus and Osric would be an added expense," Maxwell remarked gently. He was the older twin and the oldest of the Half Dozen.

"A point not to be considered lightly," Dad admitted to his thirteen-year-old son.

"I'd like Black Eagle Island," seven-year-old Robert told them emphatically.

"Am I right in assuming that the vote is unanimous for Black Eagle Island?" Dad wanted to know.

"Yes," Nancy assured him. "Is the meeting now over?"

"Unless there is further discussion," George Kimbell Ingram answered. Thereupon the Half Dozen proceeded to drape themselves on his knees, in his arms and over his chair. Bargulus took a place at his feet and settled himself contentedly.

"Are you sure Mother will be all right after this absolute rest?" Maxwell wanted to know.

"She will be perfectly well," his father answered positively. Immediately six solemn faces

put on their merriest expressions and six happy laughs, together with one energetic bark, filled the apartment. Osric, however, did not join in the noise, being content to yawn prodigiously from his elevated position.

That's how it came about that one bright day late in June the Half Dozen Ingrams took affectionate leave of their mother, who smiled at them from her chair by the window, and accompanied by Dad, a Boston Bull, a black cat in a basket, numberless suitcases and boxes, climbed into the biggest taxi they could find and ordered the driver to take them to the Pennsylvania Depot, Long Island side. They went scooting across town, down the broad thoroughfare to Thirty-second Street and in and out among trucks, mail wagons and other cars, until they finally slid down the incline and stopped before the "Long Island entrance."

Two stalwart Red Caps sprang to help with the luggage, and as Dad paid the fare, he said to the taxi man:

"In France long, Buddy?"

"Four years. Went over with the Canadians. See me there?" the driver asked in surprise.

"No, but I knew only a man who had driven a government car over there could go shooting through traffic as you did."

The driver grinned. "Drove a munitions wagon," he explained. Another taxi came down

the incline and the man had to make way, so he touched his cap and was off.

In the depot hundreds of people were waiting for trains that were not in, or running for those that were in. Guards were yelling, " Show your tickets going through the gate," and nervous women were asking numberless questions about stops and time-tables. The Half Dozen and Dad hurried through the gate, down the stairs to the long platform, following close on the heels of the Red Caps who hurried ahead to find seats for them. It was terrifically exciting and Bargulus found much he wanted to bark at, but Francis held his head down so he couldn't. A permit was tied to his collar, and the man at the door examined it.

" You may have to take him into the baggage car," he said.

Nobody objected so they all piled into the train and were lucky enough to find seats together. At last they were settled and the train pulled out.

" Hurrah, here we go! " Bob shouted.

" I wish Jane Menkler could have come with us, but she had some things to do and will be on a later train, and you children will be quite safe. Mother and I start this afternoon. Have you the address, telephone number and everything all safe, Maxes? " Dad inquired.

Thereupon Maxwell and Maxine produced lit-

tle note-books containing the information, together with complete instructions as to their behavior, food, sleep, time in the water, clothes, and each had a small roll of bills for emergencies.

" The Oakleys have cleaned the house, bought provisions and arranged for milk. There is no telephone on the Island but I understand plenty of boats pass within easy hailing distance, so it seems to me that you are all set for a jolly time. Don't forget to write every few days and if anything special happens wire to me, but try not to distress Mother," Dad said.

" We'll remember and be good," Carrol promised and they all nodded emphatically.

" You will let us know how Mother gets on? " Maxwell asked.

" You won't try to fool us about her, Dad? " Maxine whispered anxiously.

" I won't. I'll keep you posted. I just want to say that I'm pretty proud of you all, and so is Mother. That will help her a lot to get well and this fall we'll be together again, happier than ever," he promised.

The conductor came along. " Change at Jamaica," he said indifferently as he punched their tickets. The train whizzed through the tunnel, out into the open, through Forrest Hills, Kew Gardens, and then the conductor shouted from the door, " Jamaica, Jamaica! All out! "

Out they piled and across the platform a train

waited, its engine puffing and snorting as if urging them to hurry. Dad helped them on. "This is where I have to say good-bye. No more changes. Just stay here and the Oakleys will meet you at the Point. Have a good time." He kissed them all, and hurried out to the platform where he stood watching them and talking through the window, until finally the engine could wait no longer. Its great wheels began to go around and the cars moved forward. "Good-bye, good-bye," Dad called and waved as long as he could see them.

It is a very solemn occasion, this one of going away for twelve weeks, but if it was to help Mother or Dad, the Half Dozen would do it gladly. No one thought of crying, not even the littlest ones, but they did sit very quietly looking out of the window, and by and by there were so many interesting things to watch that they were kept fully occupied and were soon making a game of who could see the most things and first find the name of the town they rushed through. No one said anything about Bargulus, but he was kept in the background, under Francis's feet. There he was content to remain because he did not like traveling and would be glad when it was over. Time flew, just as the train did and almost before they realized it three hours passed and the conductor shouted, "The Point next stop! The Point next stop!" The Half Dozen

hastily gathered their things together and piled out when the train drew up at the little station.

"Reckon you are the Half Dozen Ingrams I'm waiting for," a pleasant voice greeted them. An old man, Captain Oakley, promptly took part of their luggage and helped them into a rickety car that shivered and shook at sight of them.

"Guess it is afraid of so many," Carrol remarked and Captain Oakley smiled.

"Reckon it is, little girl. You are quite a passel of young ones for one family," he told her.

"Dad and Mother need us all," Francis explained.

"Reckon they do," he agreed. "Now climb aboard and we'll go to the boat. She won't shake at sight of you. She likes a good load."

They drove through the little town and at last stopped near a bit of beach, where a sailboat tugged lazily trying to get away from the hawser that held her to the wee wharf.

"Out and in," the captain invited, so the children got out of the car and into the boat.

Captain Oakley pointed places for each one to sit, stored the luggage, including the cat and the dog, and hoisted the huge white sail, which immediately caught the breeze and puffed itself out until it looked like half a balloon. The last rope in place, the captain took his own seat and the boat, *The Mary Ann,* carried them out over

the dancing waters of the bay. It was all so wonderful that the Half Dozen couldn't find words to express their excitement so they drew long breaths of the fine salt air and smiled happily.

"Is it far to Black Eagle Island?" Francis wanted to know.

"Bit over three miles," the captain answered. "Ever sail a boat?" he asked.

"I did. There was one at camp and I learned how to sail it two years ago. It's great fun, I think," Maxwell said.

"I learned a lot about it, but I never managed a boat alone," Maxine added.

"We can all swim. We learned at camp, but Dad taught Carrol. She hasn't been to camp yet," Robert volunteered.

The captain looked at the little lame girl and smiled kindly. "I reckon you might be pretty good at swimming," he said.

"I love it and I can dive. My Dad's the best teacher in the world and I wasn't a bit afraid," she confided.

"Well, that's good. Everybody should know how to swim. Your father wrote that the housekeeper will be down on a later train, so I arranged with Captain Howe to bring her over to the Island in his boat as soon as she gets here. My wife and I are going to Jersey to visit our daughter. She hasn't been so well and we promised to go before we had the letter from Mr.

Nelson, but Captain Howe will look after you and my wife has fixed everything so you'll be comfortable on the Island. She's there now cooking up a lot of stuff and she'll tell you about the stove and show you how to manage so you can tell your housekeeper when she gets here."

"That is kind of her," Maxine thanked the captain.

"It's nothing at all. We always look after the Island. Too bad your woman couldn't come with you."

"Yes," Robert said, "but it was nice coming all by ourselves. We call Jane Menkler 'Old Ironsides.' She's been with us since before Nancy was a baby."

"She takes care of us when Father and Mother go away. They say she is a rare treasure," Nancy explained.

All the time the boat was carrying them farther and farther across the bay. The captain watched the sail, letting it out and drawing it in as the wind shifted or as he wanted to change their course and *The Mary Ann* proceeded majestically toward their destination.

"Time was when Black Eagle Island was a part of the mainland," Captain Oakley told the children. They looked at him in amazement.

"Part of the mainland?" Maxwell repeated.

"Sure was. When I was a boy it was a mile

longer than it is now and was considerably wider."

"What happened to it?" Francis demanded.

The captain let out the sail a bit before replying, then he told them. "Black Eagle Island was called Nelson's Point and it was the east boundary of the old Nelson estate. That was a long time ago. You see, the first Nelson came here from England, in 1640. David Nelson was his name, and he bought that land from the Indians. Traded a gun and a dog for it, threw in some blankets and ammunition for good measure. There's still a little piece of the property on the mainland, 'bout twenty acres. That was the west boundary. Dave Nelson built on the Point, on a firm foundation of rock and he put up a good house. One winter came a heavy spell of weather, and the water just naturally broke its way over the lowest stretch. Reckon it cut the property 'bout in two in the middle so Nelson started a bridge across, but the opening was too wide, so he kept a boat on each side to get across. I heard my grandfather tell of rowing over to visit the family. The stretch of water got a little wider each year, 'specially during storms, so when Dave Nelson's grandson lived on the old place more'n half of it was under water. When I was a boy, the Island was considerably longer than it is now, but the fourth Dave Nelson, and his son Lawrence were God

fearin' men, law abiding and decent citizens, and it just seems like the Lord suddenly took notice of what was going on and said to the waves, 'You've gone far enough, you sha'n't go no further,' and in the last forty years they's been no end of storms, real furious ones, but the waves respect the command and ain't took so much as another inch off the place. Then the present Nelson named it Black Eagle Island—I reckon he must have liked the sound of it—and Black Eagle Island it is."

Twelve eyes were wide with wonder at this story. "My, I'm glad the ocean left some," Carrol remarked seriously.

"Are you forty years old, Captain Oakley?" Nancy asked.

"Why, dear, that isn't a polite question," Maxine reminded her small sister.

"I'm sixty-five," the captain answered, and this was another astonishing bit of information, for he was strong and straight and moved about as easily as a young man.

"Aunt Phœbe is sixty, and she never goes out or does anything by herself and she carries a stick," Robert explained.

"Well," remarked the captain, "age is sorta just what we think about it and if a man begins to coddle himself before he needs to, he can soon be real decrepit, but I don't calculate to carry a stick for thirty years yet, and maybe not then."

"I'm never going to carry a stick either. I think it's lots nicer not to. Aunt Phœbe thinks children are a great trial. I reckon you don't think children are a great trial," Robert remarked wisely, moving to a seat beside the captain, who made room for him obligingly.

"No, I think they are a great blessing," the captain assured him and further proved his belief by permitting Robert to hold the end of the rope. Instantly the Half Dozen silently took allegiance to Captain Oakley and their friendship was completely settled and sealed.

Suddenly Maxwell spied a coast outline right in front of them. "Is that Black Eagle Island?" he asked.

"That's it!"

"It's big even if the ocean did take part of it away," Francis exclaimed.

"'Bout two miles long and a mile and a half in the widest part. Still a right respectable piece of property," the captain answered, beginning to draw the sail around, and in a few minutes more the Half Dozen shouted with glee as *The Mary Ann* rubbed her nose gently against the wharf and stopped as the captain threw a rope over a post. "All ashore!" he invited and out they clambered onto the land while the captain tenderly lifted Carrol onto the firm ground. "You might be a bit stiff after being still so long," he remarked.

"I was a little, thank you," Carrol admitted.

"Better keep your dog tied and your cat shut up till they get used to the place, then you won't have no trouble with them running away," the captain advised, noticing that Nancy was about to set Osric free from his basket. Thereupon she closed it again, much to Osric's disgust.

The landing was built on a low beach and the Half Dozen quickly spied a wide smooth path that led up an incline to the house and away they raced to explore their wonderful temporary home. The house was a huge old-fashioned affair with a wide porch supported by high pillars. In the doorway stood a kindly woman who welcomed them warmly.

"I reckon you children must be nearly starved, so come right in and have your dinner, it's all ready," she invited. Bags and luggage were dropped in the great hall, but first she led them out to the kitchen where six shiny basins sat in a row on a bench beside a huge pail of water. Mrs. Oakley poured some into the basins, provided towels and at once there was a jolly splashing as six pairs of hands and six faces were given hasty attention. In no time they were ready, then they marched into the living-room and took places at the long table. When they were seated Mr. and Mrs. Oakley bowed their heads and the Half Dozen followed their example.

"Dear Lord, we thank Thee for Thy many blessings," Captain Oakley said, then, after a moment he looked up, and quickly Mrs. Oakley began to serve the meal. There were baked potatoes with steak smothered in onions, a huge bowl of vegetable salad, summer squash, a pile of home-made bread, fresh baked that morning, fine butter and plenty of milk. The food disappeared as quickly as six hungry young people could eat, then followed a thick blueberry pie, that blackened their teeth and was perfectly delicious. At the end Francis looked regretfully at Mrs. Oakley.

"I wish you were going to stay with us," he informed her.

"Well, thank you, I wish I was too, but you have a good woman to look after you and before you go away in the fall, you must visit us."

"We will," they promised.

"Any of you know how to milk a cow?" Captain Oakley asked. They shook their heads regretfully. "Well, reckon I better show you. We figured you wouldn't want to be coming ashore every day for milk, so we brought one of the Nelson cows over. She's real gentle and I reckon she'll keep you in milk. Come along and see how it's done."

The Half Dozen followed the captain to a barn where a cream-colored cow stood placidly chewing her cud. "She must be milked early

every morning and at night, regular. This isn't milking time, but she won't object to my showing you." The captain petted the smooth neck, took a three-legged stool and a shiny pail from a hook and started the milking. The Half Dozen watched with the greatest interest. Then the Maxes tried it, although Maxine wasn't a great success, and after that Nancy.

"Reckon that'll be 'nough. You younger ones can learn later," the captain told them, and untying the rope that held her, he led Bess—that was the cow's name—to a little meadow and fastened her so she could get a drink at the spring and enjoy the nice grass. "Now you ladies better go in and see what the wife has to tell you, and if the gentlemen will follow me we'll go to the boat-house and I'll turn over the keys."

Robert and Francis and Maxwell followed the captain down to the beach to the boat-house and learned how to get out the boats. There were two rowboats and a small sailboat. "Reckon you can use these round here, but I wouldn't be too venturesome for a while until you know the water better. When my wife and I come back from Jersey, we'll take you all for a good sail and maybe some fishing," he promised.

"That will be fine. Thanks a lot, Captain Oakley," Maxwell said. He had paid strictest attention to the captain's directions.

Inside the house Mrs. Oakley was teaching the girls where things were kept, how to manage the stove and fireplace, and a dozen little details connected with their new life. "I'm real sorry I can't stay over and see your housekeeper. If our daughter was well we would wait a few days but she's been poorly all spring and we just got to go and see what we can do for her. You must come to see us when we get back. Captain Howe will stop 'bout every day and he'll get you supplies from the Orient when you want them, but you won't need much for a while."

The children thanked her and as they saw the captain and the boys coming up the path, she put on her bonnet, and went to meet them.

"All ready, Mother?" he called.

"All ready," she answered.

The Half Dozen escorted their two good friends to *The Mary Ann* and watched them climb aboard and throw off the rope.

"We hope your daughter is better," Maxine called.

"Thank you," they both smiled and as *The Mary Ann's* sail puffed out with the breeze it carried them away from the shore and the children watched the lovely boat bowing gaily as it sped over the rippling water.

"Wonder how soon Captain Howe will come?" Francis remarked with just a trace of loneliness in his voice.

"Let's go up and unpack our things and see how much we can do before Jane gets here," Maxine suggested.

"Don't you think we could let Osric and Bargulus out now?" Nancy asked.

"I guess it's time, but you must see that the dog doesn't disturb Bess," Maxwell answered, so in a few minutes the dog and the cat were free and they both began a systematic investigation of their surroundings. Osric was the first to be satisfied and settled himself on a braided rug on the sunny porch, but Bargulus must give the whole place a thorough going-over before he could be content.

The children had already started to take care of the luggage they had brought with them, when suddenly Maxine suggested:

"Let's look at the house before we unpack." Immediately they all dropped what they were doing and started exploring. They discovered that the porch went around two sides of the first floor and half-way across the back. The wide entrance hall was at one side and into it came the stairway. There was a door at the end which led into the kitchen and a door at the right as they went in, which opened into the living-room. This was a huge affair with five long French windows that swung open like doors. In the living-room was another door into the kitchen and one into the back room which was furnished

as a library. The library also had two French windows, one at the side facing south and one at the back, facing west. They both opened onto the porch. The kitchen had a high back door with a small enclosed stoop, and a second door that disclosed a sort of lean-to where extra wood, tools and household implements were arranged neatly. All of the furniture in the house was heavy and old-fashioned, but still beautiful. Many of the pieces were probably used by the first David Nelson. The children were delighted with the great sunny, airy place, and next marched upstairs. Here was an L-shaped hall that ran almost the full width of the house and off either side of it opened two bedrooms, four in all. The house had been remodeled somewhat and a bath had been built at the end of the hall and another in the front bedroom. Two heavy mahogany beds were made up in each room. The children decided then and there that the girls would use the front ones, and the boys the back. The porch extended across the front.

The third floor brought squeals of delight from the new tenants. Across the middle, under the eaves, was the attic and in it were piled the greatest collection of intriguing boxes, chests and trunks that the Half Dozen had ever seen. Several pieces of discarded furniture were backed against the walls, while from a lot of

hooks hung dozens of costumes, lovely ones worn by long-time-ago Nelsons. Besides this interesting array, there was an assortment of ancient toys, including dolls, furniture, rocking horses, cradles, and what not of bygone children.

"Do you suppose we may play with some of these things?" Carrol asked breathlessly.

"Perhaps they won't mind if we are very careful of the things and be sure to leave them as we find them," Maxine suggested.

"We might ask Captain Oakley when he comes back," Maxwell said.

"Perhaps Captain Howe will know," Francis said hopefully.

"Anyway, let's ask him," Nancy said and they all agreed.

Mention of Captain Howe's coming reminded the children of their unpacked things. "Let's go down and finish or we will not get anything done before Jane comes," Maxine said, so down they trooped to the hall and proceeded to carry their possessions to the bedrooms, all except those they would use downstairs. Soon the hall rack was filled with hats and coats, the box-seat received rubbers and heavy gloves, while umbrellas rested in the curved iron arms made to support them.

"I'd like to make a trip around the Island," Robert announced.

"Yes, but you must not go alone. When we

know all about it then you may tramp wherever you like," Maxwell told his small brother.

Just then the Grandfather clock in the living-room struck and the youngsters were amazed to hear it chime six. "Good gracious, I had no idea it was so late," Maxine laughed.

"Wonder where Jane and Captain Howe are?" Nancy inquired.

"The captain said they would be here about four-thirty or five o'clock," Francis reminded them.

"Well, Jane's train may have been late. Dad said in the summer time the trains are so crowded that often they do not get in on time," Carrol remarked.

The children went out onto the porch, and finally down to the water's edge, but there was no sign of a sailboat and although they played on the beach for half an hour, still Captain Howe did not put in an appearance.

"I'm hungry," announced Nancy.

"So'm I. Can't we get something to eat?" from Francis.

"Second the motion. It will be kind of fun eating by ourselves," Maxwell declared, so they raced back to the house and were soon excitedly examining the contents of the kitchen closets and pantry and found so many things to their liking that it was hard to choose which they would like for supper.

CHAPTER II

ON BLACK EAGLE ISLAND

During the hot months part of the cooking at Black Eagle Island was done on oil stoves. Maxwell bravely tackled the one in the kitchen, and after repeated failures succeeded in lighting it. Maxine put the kettle on and brought out the food, Nancy and Carrol set the table, Robert and Francis fetched and carried, and although there was some delay, everything was finally ready. To be sure there was much jumping up and down for things that had been forgotten, but nobody minded and the meal was eminently satisfactory. Mrs. Ingram had taught her children numberless little things about the care of their home and many things they had not learned of their mother had been a part of their camp training, where each accomplishment meant rewards of merit and additional honors. So now they were well equipped to take care of themselves and they looked upon this opportunity to exercise their understanding and skill as quite a lark and enjoyed it immensely.

"I say," said Francis, as he finished his berries, "hadn't we better milk the cow?"

"That's right. It is half-past seven," Maxwell agreed.

"Suppose you boys do that while we clear up the dishes. Jane will be tired after her long day and will be glad to find them done. We can save her supper for her," Maxine answered.

This was agreeable to everybody, so the boys went out, armed with a milk pail. They found Bess watching for them anxiously and had no difficulty in untying her rope from the stake and leading her to the barn, where they secured her again in the stall as Captain Oakley had showed them. Francis and Robert went up into the loft to push down some hay while Maxwell got the stool. He was about to take his seat when Robert screamed and he looked up just in time to see his small brother slide through the opening and land in the manger. Bess jerked hard on her rope and backed away, overturning the stool and pail as she went and Maxwell had to jump out of the way of her hoofs.

"Bob's killed," Francis wailed from the loft.

"I am not," Robert denied stoutly.

"Are you hurt?" Maxwell demanded.

"No, not a bit," and to prove it Bob sprang up, shook the hay from his hair and clothes, laughing heartily as he leaped out of the manger. "Sorry I scared you, old girl," he apologized to the cow.

"Well, don't take fliers like that again with-

out letting us know. You sure did make a funny picture skidding through that hole on all cylinders," his brother told him.

" You have to do that sort of thing in a hurry to make it real good," Bob replied grandly.

" Sure you aren't hurt? " Francis called from the loft.

" Sure! Come on down. There is enough hay and it's a good thing because it made a nice soft landing for me."

Although Bob had not suffered from his slide, Bess had been startled and it took the three boys several minutes to quiet her. " So, Bess," they coaxed, petting her flanks as the captain had done and soon the cow was reassured and permitted the return of the stool and pail. Maxwell took his seat gingerly and went to his task, but his lesson had been a very brief one and his progress was slow. Bess switched her tail, perhaps to speed things up a bit, and it struck the boy across the face.

" Say, quit that! " he called to the cow, but she continued to switch until he could hardly see what he was trying to do and squirted milk over his legs instead of into the pail.

" I'll hold it," Bob offered, catching the unruly tail gently but firmly in both hands.

" I'll pet her," Francis volunteered, and began stroking her neck. " So, Bess, so old girl. You'll get used to us after a while and we'll take

good care of you." Thus encouraged Bess stood quietly through the ordeal which was three times as long as she was accustomed to. However, it was finally accomplished, the pail was full and Maxwell, hot and perspiring from the exertion, sighed with relief as he put the stool away.

"Thanks, fellows. Remember anything else Captain Oakley told us to do for her?"

"Give her water," Bob suggested, so they got water from the pump and offered it to her ladyship. She sipped a little and scorned the rest.

"Guess that's all she needs," Maxwell said, so the three marched to the house with their prize.

"Jane come?" they called.

"Nope," Nancy answered.

"Let's go down to the beach and watch for the boat," Francis suggested.

Having finished their work, the Half Dozen ran to the landing but there was no sign of a sailboat across the wide expanse of water. This was surprising, and the children sat on the sand and wondered what could have become of Jane and Captain Howe. The sun was beginning to set, making a long golden path across the bay, and they watched it with delight, until at last Maxine said:

"Mother would want you younger children to be in bed now. Let's go to the house and do just as we would if she and Dad were here."

Back to the house they went. They had had a long busy day and were truly tired, and in a short time Carrol and Robert were tucked into bed and were immediately sound asleep.

"It's our bedtime too, Nan," Francis reminded his sister, so off they went to their own beds, with a cheery "Good-night" to the Maxes.

For a long time the two older children sat in silence, occasionally going to the door to see if they could catch a glimpse of the delayed travelers.

"What do you suppose can have happened?" Maxwell asked.

"I don't know. Something must have happened, but we must not let the others see we are worried. Do you suppose the captain would bring her as late as this?"

"People do sail at night, but I don't know if they would here. I don't see how she could have missed him if she got to the Point and unless there was a big train accident she should have been there before dark."

"Yes," Maxine admitted. The clock struck eleven. "Suppose we go to bed. Even if we lock up the house, we can hear her if she comes."

"All right," Maxwell agreed, so the two saw that doors and windows were secured and climbed up to their rooms.

"Good-night, pleasant dreams," they whispered to each other and in half an hour they too were fast asleep.

In spite of the strangeness of their surroundings, the Maxes slept well. Maxine waked first, about half-past six, and for several moments she lay wondering where she was. She looked about the unfamiliar rooms, heard the waves splashing on the shore, and then she remembered. Carrol was in the next bed and Nancy in the adjoining room. The world was beautifully peaceful and quiet. Maxine heard the birds chirping busily about their morning task in the huge trees that grew about the house. Suddenly she recalled Jane's non-appearance and sprang out of bed to see if by any chance their faithful maid had arrived. Throwing on a wrap she ran down the stairs through the rooms and out to the porch, but everything was exactly as they had left it the night before and she could hear Bess moo-ing impatiently in the stable. She went back upstairs and knocked at her brother's door.

"Good-morning, sir. Getting up? Bess wants you."

"Good-morning yourself," Maxwell answered sleepily, then bestirring himself, he added, "Be with you and Bess in a few minutes."

Then Maxine waked the two little girls who yawned and blinked at her. "Hop up and see the sun," she invited. In short order Maxine

was in the kitchen singing merrily as she started breakfast and in a few minutes Nancy joined her. The rest of the Half Dozen did not linger over their dressing and trooped noisily into the kitchen.

"Where's Jane?" Carrol demanded.

"Oh, she did not come yet," Maxine answered lightly

"We'll attend to Bess," Maxwell announced, and he and his brothers went out to tackle the cow. The business of milking went off more easily and quickly than it did the evening before, and by the time the boys were finished Nancy shouted:

"Breakfast served in the forward cabin. Better hurry, everybody."

No one needed urging and soon all six were gathered happily about the long table. They bowed their heads a moment over the food then pitched in with a will. Everything tasted mighty good.

"It's fun being by ourselves," Francis declared.

"It is fun," Nancy agreed and the rest grinned to show that they felt the same way.

"When the chores are done, I propose that we explore the Island," Maxine said.

"Hurrah!" The youngsters greeted the suggestion with lusty approval. When the meal was finished, they hurried to clear away the

dishes, straighten their rooms and lock up the house.

"I think I shall leave a note so that in case Jane comes she will know we are here and all right," Maxine announced. She wrote a brief memorandum, saying:

"DEAR JANE:

We have gone out to explore the Island. We are all right and will be back soon.

THE MAXES."

"I say," said Maxwell, "exploring two miles of Island will take some time. Could we put up a lunch and eat it somewhere?"

"That would be fine," Nancy burst out, "then we can take as long as we like."

They added a line to Jane's note saying, "We are taking lunch," and set to work making sandwiches. The last of Mrs. Oakley's pie was appropriated, also two cans of sardines and boxes of crackers. It was not very elaborate, but there was plenty of it. Francis discovered an old fishing basket with loop handles in which they could carry the lunch, and this was pressed into service. The Half Dozen wore scout suits and their stoutest shoes and big hats. Maxwell found a short, stout stick to help Carrol walk more easily, and finally, when all was ready, they set out with Bargulus at their heels, going first toward the boat landing where they scanned the water for

a sight of Captain Howe's sail. They saw nothing that looked like it. There were two sailboats lazily skimming over the water but they were pleasure craft, each manned by youngsters in bathing suits who were playing on the boats.

"Suppose Jane does not come?" Francis remarked thoughtfully.

"Oh, well, suppose she doesn't, we'll get along," Maxwell answered indifferently. The rest of the children looked a bit solemn at the idea, but as the Maxes did not seem to think "Old Ironsides'" not coming would be a calamity, they caught the spirit of independence and promptly dismissed any feeling of anxiety that started to grow in their minds.

"We'll have a beautiful time until Jane comes," Nancy declared delightedly

"We could play desert island," Carrol exclaimed.

"Let's make believe that we are on a desert island now and that we are Robinson Crusoe's children," Robert suggested.

"And we have just been swept up by the waves and must hunt for food and shelter," Carrol added happily. Carrol loved to make believe.

"That will be fine," Maxine said, glad to enter into the play and get the smaller children's minds busy on something besides Jane.

"We have been tossed on our wreck all night and the sun has dried us as we slept on the beach," Maxwell offered as a starter.

"Yes," Carrol put in. "We must all lie down and make believe we are just waking up." So, following her lead, the Half Dozen curled up on the beach in attitudes of exhaustion. After a minute Nancy stirred and rubbed her eyes in a most realistic manner. She leaned over and touched Francis on the shoulder.

"My poor brother," she declared tragically. "I fear me he is dead."

Francis followed the lead and gave a good imitation of having been drowned. Nancy felt his heart and rolled him over cautiously. Then Carrol opened her eyes.

"Oh, Nan, are you alive?" she asked weakly.

"Yes," declared Nancy, "are you?"

"I'm not sure," Carrol answered, moving her body speculatively. "Yes, I'm all right, but I have a terrible feeling in my stomach. Are we the only ones saved?"

"I'll see," Nancy answered and moving cautiously among the others, she touched them, one by one. Maxwell opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he wanted to know.

"On a desert island. Are you badly hurt?" Nancy asked anxiously.

"No," Maxwell assured her. "How are the others?"

"I'm all right," Robert answered sitting up and looking about him.

"I'm exhausted," Maxine explained.

"I believe Francis has a breath of life in him. Do help me try to bring him to," Nancy begged. Laboriously the five of them worked over Francis, until at last he began to breathe deeply.

"He is coming to," Carrol announced gleefully and Francis opened his eyes, and looked vacantly at them.

"Don't you know us, brother?" Maxine asked heart-brokenly.

"Yes. You are cannibals," putting his hand to his head.

"We are your brothers and sisters," Nancy cried despairingly.

"Oh, yes. I remember. I'm all right now," Francis answered.

"Then you'd better stand up if you can. We must get away from the beach because if there are savages on this island they will see us," Carrol told him.

"We must hunt for food and shelter," Maxwell added, so, after carefully scanning the horizon for a rescuing ship, the Half Dozen started wearily along the trail toward the boat-house. Slowly they followed a path that led them up the steep cliff which was thick with foliage and tall trees. The trees were so enormous that it

took three of the children with arms outstretched to reach around their trunks.

"Are these palms or date trees?" Carrol asked hopefully.

"No, no dates on them," Robert answered with real regret.

"Oh," called Nancy who was a little ahead of the others, "I've found something to eat." The rest hastened to join her. There was a clump of blueberry bushes. The castaways fell on the ripe fruit greedily, eager to satisfy their starving tummies.

"I feel better," Robert declared. "So do I," the others chimed in, and thus sustained, they continued their tour of investigation, rarely forgetting the parts they were playing.

They crept cautiously through the stretches of forests, dropping on all fours at every unusual sound, and peeking from behind trees to be sure the way was not strewn with hungry savages waiting to devour them. As they advanced, they became more and more convinced that the Island was uninhabited, but they did not cease their vigilance. The path they followed led them at last to the beach. Here they discovered that the rocks had been placed to form a shelter and were blackened by numberless fires that had been built on them.

"Do you suppose this is where the cannibals

do their cooking?" Francis asked in an awed whisper.

"It looks like a kind of burnt offering place," Maxine admitted

Carrol explored it a bit further. "This is Fireplace Point," she called out and, sure enough, on a huge white boulder someone had painted FIREPLACE POINT in big black letters.

"Wonder what it was for," they speculated, but as none of them could guess, they proceeded along a rocky shore until another path beckoned them back into the Island. They followed it single file, Maxwell in the lead and Maxine bringing up the rear with Carrol, who could not go quite as fast as the others.

"Here's a lake," Maxwell called to them as he came upon a large, clear body of fresh water that seemed to be fed by a number of little springs that flowed into one end of it. One of the springs came out of a rock higher than the others and made a pretty fall as it gurgled into the lake, as if happy to be there.

"Now we cannot die of thirst," Carrol laughed, and the others joined in because they had nearly forgotten the game, but they were quick to take it up again, and each one scooped out water with his hands and pretended to drink. But they really did bathe their faces and found the water delightfully cool and pleasant.

"Let's paddle," Nancy suggested. They all thought the idea was a good one, so off came shoes and stockings and they were soon splashing about wriggling their toes and kicking in the water.

"Isn't it great?" Francis demanded.

"I reckon it is," Robert answered, remembering Captain Oakley's way of expressing his agreement.

When they had enough of paddling, they let their feet dry in the sun and put on their shoes and stockings. Then they called Bargulus, who had scampered off to look things over himself, and then continued around the lake until they reached the opposite side where they found a wilderness of berry bushes—blue, black and some raspberry. The blueberries were nice and ripe and most tempting.

"What say we eat our lunch here? It is nearly one o'clock," Maxwell announced.

"With dessert growing here for us," Nancy laughed.

"I had no idea it was so late," Maxine admitted.

"Haven't we been having the beautifullest time!" Carrol said dreamily.

"Yes, we have. You must sit down, Caro, and I'll pick berries for you," Francis ordered kindly, knowing that his sister wasn't used to such long walks.

"I'll help you," Robert offered, so the boys each found a big leaf and folded it into a cup, which they had no trouble filling. Then the others got out the lunch. Cups were filled with cool, refreshing water at the spring, and how they did enjoy that picnic! Bargulus was on hand for his share, but the morning's tramp had not made him a bit tired, and when he had gobbled his food, he raced off after an imaginary enemy.

While Carrol rested, the others played around the lake and filled their caps with berries to take home for breakfast. Finally Carrol announced that she was ready, so again they started following the shore line until they were half-way around the Island. They came upon a long neck of shore, where the tide was low, so they tramped about the damp sand.

"I believe there are clams here," Maxwell declared, and digging a few inches below the surface he was rewarded by finding a good-sized shell-fish. The others gathered around to view the prize.

"Let's get enough for supper," Nancy suggested and she too drew out a clam.

"You sit down on that rock, Carrol, while we dig," Maxwell told the little girl and helped her make a comfortable seat on the great rock which seemed to have remained there especially to serve her.

Eagerly the youngsters scooped off sand and

after half an hour they had filled their fish basket.

"We won't starve on this desert island," Maxine laughed, as she viewed the catch.

"I should say not," the others agreed.

"Suppose we start again," Francis urged. He was a little tired of digging and eager to see what else they would find.

Off they went, climbing some steep cliffs which overlooked the Sound, following a path through a stretch of forest, around onto a dandy little beach where they lingered again to play and rest, then on until they reached a strip of boggy land where a wonderful lot of lily-pads and cat-tails welcomed them. Here they discovered another old boat-house that did not seem to be in use. Walking a short distance further they came upon an old orchard with cherry trees, still bearing a quantity of ripe fruit.

"This Island must have been inhabited by a prehistoric race," Maxine told them and they were further convinced of the fact when they came upon a wee hen-house around which a dozen chickens were scratching and clucking busily.

"Maybe there are some eggs," Robert said and he dived into the coop. Sure enough, he found a dozen nests and as many fresh eggs. They found a few more eggs that were not good and threw them out of the nest.

"I believe these chickens must have been brought here recently," Maxwell said.

"Perhaps Captain Oakley brought them when he brought the cow and forgot to tell us," said Nancy.

"That must be it."

The children were now in sight of the barn and having made the circuit of their domain, they carried their treasures into the house. Of course they called, "Jane, Jane," but no Jane answered. There was their own note, and no sign of the missing housekeeper. From the porch they scanned the bay, but no sailboat greeted them, and in spite of all their play the Half Dozen were truly alarmed.

"Cow to be milked, chickens to be fed, also cat, dog and family," Maxine called as if she had never expected to find "Old Ironsides" there at all. "Anybody know how to cook clams?"

"Put them in water and let them come to a boil and they open. I have watched Jane do it lots of times," Carrol answered. They found a big kettle in the lean-to, filled it at the pump, and soon the evening jobs were getting proper attention. It was seven o'clock when they took their places in the huge living-room, chatting cheerfully over the events of the day as they ate. The clams were a bit sandy, but they didn't mind. When the meal was finished Carrol reminded them that the daily letter to Mother and

Dad had not been written, so they all scrambled for pens and paper, but before they started Maxwell spoke:

"I say, everybody, remember what Dad said about not worrying Mother. I am not going to write a word about Jane's not coming and I am going to be mighty careful to make her think that everything is all O. K."

"We'll all read our letters aloud to be sure nothing is in them to worry her," Nancy answered.

This was a good plan, so for the next half hour six heads bent over paper and six pens told of their adventures since leaving the city. Finally they were ready, and each youngster read what he had written. No one could find fault with a line, so the letters were all sealed in one big envelope and left in the library until they could get an opportunity to mail it.

"I think the occasion calls for a counsel," Francis said, thereupon the Half Dozen dutifully gathered around, with the Maxes presiding.

"Everybody present," Maxwell began, giving a fairly good imitation of his father's manner.

Everybody was present, even the cat and dog, so Maxwell went on:

"For some reason, which we will probably discover later, 'Old Ironsides' has not joined us.

Almost all of us have been away to camps and liked it, so I think we can manage fine. Captain Oakley will be back from New Jersey in a few days and when he comes we can get more supplies if we need them, and he will bring mail to us. As long as everything looks all right I think we should carry on. If we sent word to Dad, he'd come to find out what was the trouble and probably by the time he would get here we will have heard from Jane. It would only mean a long trip and a lot of worry for nothing. That's what I think about it. How about the rest?"

"I think as you do, Maxwell," his sister answered promptly.

"So do we all. Let's adjourn," Nancy added.

"Yes, so do we all. Let's go down to the beach and play a while," Robert put in. Having settled the whole matter that Mother and Dad were not to be distressed, the plucky Half Dozen raced to the beach, determined to have a paddling match before going to bed. They made wonderful houses in the sand, using the prettiest rocks for paths and even searching in the water for fancy shells which they found in abundance, until finally the Maxes reminded them that bedtime was upon them, so back they marched to the house. Toilets were made and sleepy heads burrowed among the pillows. The Maxes kissed their brothers and sisters good-night.

"We shall be downstairs. If you want anything, call," Maxwell told them.

Downstairs the two sat thoughtfully. "Do you know what we might do? Pick some of those berries and sell them. Perhaps Captain Oakley would know some people on the mainland who would be glad to have them," Maxine suggested.

"That's right. I don't believe the Nelsons would mind because no one else is coming on the Island and the blueberries will go to waste. There are more than we can eat."

"Perhaps we could make enough so we would not need to use the money Dad gave us," Maxine smiled.

"That would be fine. I've been thinking tomorrow I will try out that sailboat, close to the shore until I get the hang of her, then if Captain Oakley should not get back for a few days I could sail her across to mail our letters. If Dad and Mother don't hear from us they will worry."

"That's a good idea. What do you suppose can have happened to Jane? It seems queer that Captain Howe did not come over and let us know."

"I've wondered about that too. He may have come while we were away to-day," Maxwell answered.

"Yes, I thought of that, but if we had just

stayed here watching, the children would have worried. It seemed the best thing to keep them interested. That's what Mother tries to do."

" It was much better than hanging around all day and I have a feeling that if Captain Howe came he would have left some word, so I don't believe he was here," her brother assured her.

" Wasn't it great we discovered the chickens? The eggs will be a big help and Carrol can have a fresh one every day. They will be good for her."

" That's so. Well," Maxwell added stretching prodigiously, " this quiet life is killing me. I move we lock up and go to bed."

" Me too," Maxine mimicked, so they locked up and sought their own beds where their responsibilities were quickly forgotten because the sandman had been waiting for them for quite a time and having tumbled out a lot of pleasant dreams for them all, he closed his bag and slipped away to other charges.

CHAPTER III

THE JR. BLACK EAGLE

THE next morning the Half Dozen, arrayed in bathing suits, were at the boat-house bright and early. Maxwell had little difficulty getting the sailboat into the water and drawing her up to the dock. She wasn't a very large affair but she was in good order and her name, *Jr. Black Eagle,* was printed in fine big letters on her bow. Francis found a tiny American flag which they hoisted to the top of her mast where it waved bravely, as if thoroughly appreciating its importance. Maxwell tied the boat with a long rope to the post, and climbed in while he examined pulleys until he was well acquainted with their uses. Then he put up the sail about three-quarters of the way and experimented with the breeze, letting the *Jr. Black Eagle* tug out to the end of the hawser. The five youngsters watched him in thrilled excitement from the shore, and finally, when he was sure of himself, he called:

"Throw off the rope when I come up close."

Nancy threw it off for him and he hauled it in expertly and taking his seat, let the breeze catch the sail.

"Hurrah, hurrah for the *Jr. Black Eagle,*" the children shouted as the boat bowed its majestic way out into the water. Maxwell sailed her near the shore while his brothers and sisters ran along the beach cheering lustily after him. A short distance down the harbor he came about, running back and making a very neat landing.

"Anybody want to have a ride?" he invited. "Don't all come aboard at once because I need a bit more training before I take too many passengers."

"Suppose you take Francis and Nan first," Maxine suggested so they climbed aboard and took their places gleefully.

"Isn't this great?" Nancy exclaimed delightedly as the *Jr. Black Eagle* carried them proudly up toward the cliff side of the Island.

"It's a good thing we thought to put on our bathing suits," Francis remarked, "then if we capsize we can swim ashore."

"That's what I reckoned when I told you to put them on," Maxwell answered. "Now, look out for the boom." The two ducked as it came around and shouted happily when it passed over their heads.

"When you get more used to her, will you teach us to sail, Maxes?" Francis coaxed.

"Sure, I expect you all to learn because I don't want to be the only boatman in the family!" Maxwell answered. "Guess it's time for

the next batch. How about Bob and Carrol coming?"

"Take Bob and let Carrol come with me," Maxine called, so Bob climbed aboard.

"I might as well have two passengers," Maxwell reminded them.

"You stay on, Nan, and I'll have another ride later," Francis told his sister, so Nancy stayed aboard for the trip down the coast.

Finally Maxine and Carrol had their ride and the little girl was too happy for words.

"It's just like a bird," she declared taking deep breaths of the wonderful salt air. Up and down they sailed, then Maxwell tried more passengers and at last he was willing to have the entire family. Only Bargulus stayed ashore to bark after them.

"We must teach him to ride, too," Robert declared.

"He'll have to be held still," Francis reminded them.

"The *Jr. Black Eagle* is just big enough for us, and Bargulus will have to learn to dodge the boom," Maxwell answered.

"Yesterday I saw a dog on a sailboat. He was a big fellow and kept crouched close to the bow. He seemed to like it because he kept his nose stretched out as if he were having a grand time," Maxwell told them.

"Suppose Osric would like it?" Nancy

wanted to know. "What do you think he was doing this morning? I saw him dipping his feet right into the water and splashing. I thought he was after a fish but he wasn't; he was just playing."

"That's queer; cats don't usually like water."

"Osric is an exceptional cat," Carrol said solemnly and they all laughed because they really thought there wasn't in all the world another cat quite as remarkable as their pet.

For two hours the Half Dozen sailed up and down the Island, exclaiming at the beauty of the beach, the lovely soft clouds that floated quietly across the sky, which was a wonderful deep blue, and the mainland which stood out hazily in the distance like a city of enchanted castles. They had just turned about to go back toward the dock when they heard the "chunk chunk" of a motor and saw a boat with its nose high in the air, making straight toward the Island. Maxwell let out more sail and the small boat hurried along, arriving a few minutes before the motor.

"It may be someone for us," Maxine suggested. "Let's land." They had just climbed ashore when the motor stopped and the other boat swung around uncertainly.

There were three men aboard and the appearance of the children seemed to surprise them. The Half Dozen could hear them conferring together, but the men spoke too softly for them

to catch what was being said. After a few moments' delay the motor started again and soon the boat, which did not have a name on her bow, plowed furiously through the water and disappeared toward the Sound.

"Well, I thought she was coming here," Maxine said in amazement.

"So did I," Maxwell said wondering.

"She stopped and turned about as soon as the men saw us," Nancy said puzzled.

"Seems queer," they all agreed. They secured the *Jr. Black Eagle* and climbed the cliff, but the motor-boat was still speeding away from them and they simply could not make it out.

"Guess they did not have any word for us," Maxwell remarked, truly bewildered at the behavior of the boatmen.

However, they could not waste time wondering and went back to the beach for a swim before lunch. When their appetites warned them that it was noon they drew their boat close to shore and went back to the house. They were just finishing lunch when Carrol exclaimed:

"Isn't that the motor-boat?"

They listened a moment and sure enough they heard the "chunk chunk" and hurried out to the porch. The boat was still some distance out but coming toward the dock.

"Let's keep quiet and see how close they

come," Nancy suggested, so they watched from behind the huge pillars of the porch.

The three boatmen seemed to be keeping a sharp lookout until they nearly reached the shore.

"I don't want them to land if they have no right to," Maxwell declared and started for the beach closely followed by his brothers and sisters.

They ran noisily along the pebbly path and immediately the nose of the boat was turned and she started again toward the open water.

"Now, I'm sure they have no right to come here," Maxwell announced positively.

"What do you suppose they are trying to do?" Francis asked.

"Can't tell, but they didn't expect to find anyone and we have scared them off for some reason or other."

It was certainly a puzzling way to act and the Half Dozen were greatly mystified.

"I expect they are robbers of some kind," Francis insisted.

"Oh, what would robbers be doing over here?" Nancy demanded.

"I don't know, but if they were not robbers, why didn't they hail us?" Francis asked her.

"I don't know," she had to admit.

"We forgot to clear up the lunch things," Maxine told them. Back in the house they straightened things up, and when everything was in place, Francis asked:

"Say, Maxes, I want to go for a walk; may I?"

"I'd like to go with you," Nancy added.

"I don't mind if you're not too long. Where do you plan to walk?" Maxine asked.

"Round the Sound side of the Island."

"Take me," Bob pleaded.

"Sure," his brother agreed.

"Well, I say, suppose you plan to be back at a certain time, say four or four-thirty, then Maxine and I will know when to look for you."

"All right, Maxes. I have my wrist watch," Nancy promised and the three started.

"Shall we take a pail and get some blueberries if we find any?"

"Let's," Francis answered, running back for a pail.

They set out directly toward the Sound and were soon out of sight of the house.

"I think I shall go to the beach, perhaps sail a little and keep an eye out for our strange visitors," Maxwell told his sisters.

"All right. I want to investigate that flower garden. It looks interesting," Maxine answered.

"May I come with you? I want to see the garden too," Carrol asked.

"Glad to have you," Maxine agreed.

"Shout if you need me," Maxwell called as he started down the path.

"We will," Carrol promised, and the two went through the library, across the porch, and into an ancient garden. The first thing they spied was an old sun-dial high on a pedestal. It was made of copper, elaborately carved, and after careful examination Maxine made out the date and inscription in old English letters:

HIS MAJESTY, HENRY VIII, 1520.

There was more to the inscription but the letters were too dimmed with age to decipher.

"Some of the first Nelson family must have brought this to America with them. It probably told the hours somewhere in England and goodness knows how many other places before it was set up here," said Maxine.

The two watched the shadow move slowly between the figures and were intensely interested in the ancient timepiece.

"Do you suppose the Princes who were killed in the Tower used to tell time by this?" Carrol asked.

"No. But Princess Elizabeth and her brother and sister may have because Henry VIII was their father," Maxine answered, adding, "Oh, there is a bird bath; let's see if there is any water in it."

The bird bath was in the center of the garden and almost covered with climbing roses that grew right over the top. Maxine cleared some

of the branches away, but there wasn't a bit of water in the basin.

"Let's fill it and see if the birds will come. Dad says people should have baths for the birds because they do so much for us," Carrol said, so they got a pail of water which they poured into the bath.

"What did Dad tell you the birds do for us?" Maxine asked.

"He said the birds are our best friends. All kinds of birds. They come every season, some day birds and some at night and they eat up the bugs and the insect eggs, and some of them even kill big things like mice. Dad said if it wasn't for the birds the insects would destroy all the green things, but God has the birds eat up so many insect eggs that they cannot kill the trees and things that grow. He said he was on a big fruit ranch out west and the man who owned the ranch put baths for the birds and made little places for their nests and they were his partners and helped him keep his orchards free from pests. He was nice to the birds and some lived on his ranch all year around," Carrol answered.

"Did Dad tell you that the birds carry seeds sometimes and drop them where they will grow again?"

"No, I don't remember his saying that, but he did say that they help keep weeds out of the lawns and crops and worms too. He said the

woodpecker uses his bill like a chisel and mallet and goes right after grubs that are boring under the bark of the trees. He said the vireos clear the insect eggs off the ends of young plants, and some cuckoo birds go for the gypsy moth and the gulls keep the beaches and water clear of dead fish."

"He told you a lot about the birds."

"Sometimes when you are in school and we walk in the park, Dad shows me the nests. Do you suppose they will come here to drink?"

"Let's keep quiet and see," Maxine suggested, so they continued their walk about the garden very quietly and soon they heard the happy chirp of a catbird in one of the near-by willow trees. They stood still and sure enough, in a few minutes, Mr. Catbird hovered over the bath and alighted daintily on the edge. He was quite delighted with the cool water and promptly stepped in, tossing it gaily over his wings and indulging in a good drink. He hadn't nearly finished when a robin joined him and they splashed together in the friendliest fashion. No sooner had they flown back to the trees than a fly-catcher accepted the invitation and a swallow came cheerily. Carrol could hardly keep still she was so excited. It seemed as if the birds must have been waiting for their baths for they came in twos and threes and sang their thanks as they hopped about in their rose-covered bath.

"We must keep it full as long as we are here," Maxine declared. "Let's look at the rest of the garden."

The garden had been laid out a long time ago in the greatest number of designs. There were circles, moons, figure eights, ovals, squares and oblongs each outlined with low box hedge and it looked as if there must have been different kinds of flowers in every one. Some of the plants had come up by themselves and were blossoming. There were tiny pansies, tall hollyhocks, tiger lilies and a great bed of forget-me-nots. In three of the enclosures stood stately cedars, and outside of the garden were two long rows of lovely old willows.

"It's a little like Aunt Phœbe's garden, only she hasn't any weeds or sun-dials in hers," Carrol remarked.

"I guess when the family is here they keep it nice," Maxine answered.

Then the two went around to the back of the house where they found currant, raspberry, gooseberry and blackberry bushes, a grape arbor and another bird bath, which they filled with water. It was immediately discovered by their feathered friends who promptly took advantage of its fresh coolness and enjoyed it hugely.

Maxine and Carrol were watching them delightedly when they were suddenly startled by Francis, running toward them and shouting:

"Maxes! Maxes!"

Maxine ran to meet him. "What is it, dear? Anyone hurt?"

"No, we are all right, but we found something. Where's Maxwell?"

"Down at the boat. What did you find?"

Without waiting to answer, Francis ran to the front of the house and shouted at the top of his lungs, "Maxes! Oh, Maxes!"

"Hello!" Maxwell answered and in a moment he came hurrying up the path. "What is it?"

Maxine and Carrol had followed Francis. "What is it?" they wanted to know.

"Remember that boat-house around on the Sound? There's a kind of marshy ground in front of it and lily pads and cat-tails and tall grass?"

"Yes, what about it?" Maxwell interrupted.

"Was there a rowboat there yesterday?" Francis demanded.

"No, there wasn't," Maxwell answered positively.

"There wasn't anything there, I remember. I wonder if the Nelsons ever used it?" Maxine added.

"Well, there's a boat there now, a rowboat, and there are a lot of empty boxes and straw in the house. We were sitting on a rock where we could see the boat-house and the water, and Nancy said there was a boat tied in the weeds, so

we went down very quietly but there wasn't anyone about and after a while we peeked into the boat-house. It's half full of light wooden boxes and straw scattered all over. The boxes are open but there is nothing in them. We were all coming back to tell you, but Nancy said for me to come while she and Bob watched to see if anything happened. So I ran and ran, but I didn't shout until I got almost to the house because I didn't want anyone to hear me. Nancy says someone must be on the Island."

The Maxes exchanged glances. "I'll go back and be sure the *Jr. Black Eagle* is fastened tight, and you lock up the house, then we'll go over and see what we can see. Think that's a good plan?" Maxwell asked.

"Yes," Maxine agreed. "If we are ready first, Carrol and I will go ahead with Francis and you can overtake us. I wish Nancy and Bob had not waited."

"Oh, they will be all right; they are well hidden behind some rocks from where they can see the boat easily," Francis assured them.

Maxwell raced to the sailboat and when Maxine closed up the house she and Carrol set out with Francis. They had not gone far when Maxwell overtook them and they all hurried as fast as they could with the little girl. They had nearly reached the spot, when they saw Robert running to meet them.

" Come real easy," he whispered. " There are two men in the boat-house and Nancy sent me to tell you to be careful."

The five slipped forward slowly, managing to keep themselves well out of sight, and soon Robert led them to where Nancy lay hidden.

" Stoop down and watch," she whispered.

They concealed themselves easily in the tall foliage. About a minute passed, but it seemed longer, when they saw one of the men come out with his arms full of boxes. He walked to an open place on the shore and stacking them in a pile, he took straw from one of them and lighted the whole thing with a match. The other man came out with more which he threw onto the fire. It blazed up quickly and for the next few minutes one man watched it burn while the other brought more boxes and straw. Perhaps a quarter of an hour was consumed this way. The tide was coming in and running close to the bonfire.

" Look! " Nancy whispered pointing out the Sound.

They saw a big sailboat moving slowly forward. She came a little distance and changed her course, and as the children watched her, she came about again and sailed lazily in the opposite direction.

" I believe she is with these chaps," Maxine declared softly and her twin nodded that he was of the same opinion.

"Shall we go down and scare them away?" Nancy said.

"We cannot find out what they are doing if we scare them away, and they might not scare so easily as they did nearer the house," Maxwell told her.

It did not take the fire long to burn the stuff and in a little while the blaze died down. The rising tide picked up the burnt bits of wood and tossed them up and down on the breakers. When it was nearly all burned, one of the men went and untied the rowboat which he brought around to where the other waited. As it came close the man jumped in, sat down beside his companion, took one of the oars and the two rowed quickly out into the Sound. The children saw the sailboat make toward them swiftly and in five minutes they were aboard her, the little boat fastened at the back. The sail was brought about sharply and the boat tipped dangerously as she made a short turn, then, with a full sail, she skimmed over the water and was soon out of sight. Even after she had gone the children remained quiet lest someone discover their presence, but finally as the birds and the waves were the only sounds that reached them, they stood up.

"I'll go down to the boat-house and see what I can see," Maxwell said.

"Let's all go," Nancy insisted.

The tide had washed away almost all sight of the fire, and inside the little boat-house had been carefully cleaned of whatever had been there. They found some footprints of the men's high rubber boots in the sand, but the waves swept them away almost at once. They searched carefully for a clue to the identity of their visitors, but could find nothing, for the men had taken great care to keep themselves and their actions a secret.

"Did either of them take their caps off?" Maxwell asked Nancy.

"No. They kept them down over their foreheads all the time. I thought they were fishermen at first because they wore slickers and boots and looked like the pictures of fishermen, all dressed alike," Nancy answered sadly.

"Well, I don't know that we can do any good here. It's getting late and they evidently have finished whatever they wanted to do. Let's go back to the house," Maxwell suggested.

The Half Dozen returned leisurely, commenting and wondering at the meaning of what they had witnessed, but not one could suggest a satisfactory solution. Here they were in the midst of two unexplainable mysteries. Not a hint had they heard as to the whereabouts of Jane or Captain Howe but they felt confident that Captain Oakley would be able to give them some light on that subject, and, on second thought, he

might even be able to tell them a bit about the boatmen now sailing off somewhere across the Sound.

As they neared the house Carrol remembered the afternoon in the old gardens. "You must come and see the bird baths and sun-dial," she urged, so the Half Dozen trooped around the house and exclaimed satisfactorily over the discoveries. Both baths were rendering good service and the birds, dozens of them, performed for the children's special benefit.

"Shall I see that they have water every day?" Nancy asked.

"I think it would be a splendid idea," Maxine answered.

"We are all getting jobs. I want to take care of the hens," Francis announced.

"That is agreeable," Maxwell told him.

"Carrol is my right-hand lady, and Bob can be your right-hand boy, then we will have plenty of good assistance," Maxine laughed.

Carrol and Bob accepted the responsibility and felt quite important at being chosen.

The next two hours were busy ones for it was dinner and milking time and when those two departments of the little community were taken care of Nancy wanted to know:

"Say, Maxwell, when are we going to set up the radio?"

"That's so, I had forgotten it. I'll get busy

to-night if I may call on the entire company for assistance."

They looked over the house and finally decided that the living-room was the best location. Their set was a neutrodyne, an "Eagle" that their father had given them for Christmas and they all loved its slick black panel and beautiful walnut cabinet. As they had not brought the console because it was too big, they selected a strong table with a shelf underneath for the batteries. Nancy unwrapped the set of new tubes they had just bought, while Francis took the coverings off the "B" batteries. Maxwell unpacked the "A" battery because that was big and heavy, while Carrol and Robert straightened out the spool of wire. Maxwell cleaned off a pipe that he was going to try out for a ground, and Maxine helped lay the antenna wire close to the wainscoating of the room so it did not show and was out of the way.

"Just for to-night, I'll run up an inside aerial and to-morrow we'll see what we can find for outside," Maxwell explained.

All this, with so many eager helpers, did not take very long and at last when every wire was secure and all terminals properly connected, they attached the loud speaker and fitted the tubes into their sockets. Francis pulled out the wee plug and the lights shone brilliantly.

"She's all right," he cried delightedly. "Let's see what we can get."

Maxwell turned the two dials slowly and in a moment they heard a well-remembered voice telling them, "This is the concert on the Mall and you will now hear the orchestra playing 'On the Radio.'"

They were thrilled to pieces, listened delightedly to many of their favorite selections and joined heartily in the applause that followed. After that, they heard the rest of the great out-of-door concert, and then they heard a troop of troubadors playing music from all lands. The announcer chatted pleasantly, just as if he were talking directly to them and it made them forget, for the time at least, that they were alone and shut off somewhat from the rest of the world. The first bed hour passed without attracting anyone's attention, but at last Maxine happened to glance at the clock which seemed to have been conspiring with the younger children.

"Good gracious, do you see the time?" she exclaimed, so away the little folks went to bed.

"Don't turn it off. Let's listen from upstairs," Robert coaxed.

"Will you stay in bed?" Maxwell demanded.

"Sure," Bob promised.

"All right, I'll let her go a while longer."

When Carrol called that they were ready, the Maxes went up to bid them good-night. The

small girl put her arms about her brother's neck and whispered, " God will take care of all of us and Mother and Dad, won't He? "

The boy gave her a big hug. " Sure He will," he answered promptly.

Back in the living-room a couple of jolly fellows were singing and playing well-known songs of long ago, and telling jokes on each other. The Maxes listened without paying very much attention.

" I planned to go to the mainland to-morrow in the sailboat, but I guess I'd better wait another day and see if those chaps come back."

" I wish we could get our letter off to Mother and Dad. I thought I would write a little more to-night."

" If they don't hear from us they may worry, but we promised to let them know if everything wasn't all right."

" Yes, and Dad knows we can't get off many letters, but if they could just get the first one, it would be better."

" That's right. I'll go over to-morrow and hustle back. You tell them to-night that we can't get to the post-office very often and then if they don't hear, they will understand," said Maxwell.

Maxine wrote her letter, giving a glowing account of the Island, the house and the old garden, and Maxwell wrote them about the *Jr.*

Black Eagle and the fun they all had sailing her. When it was finished the two examined it thoughtfully and assured themselves that it contained nothing alarming.

CHAPTER IV

STORM

The next day was Saturday and immediately after an early breakfast five of the Half Dozen watched their big brother set sail with the letters. It was a beautiful day and the *Jr. Black Eagle* started gaily off toward the mainland as if greatly enjoying the prospect of the trip. She behaved remarkably well, occasionally bowing to another boat. A few of them bowed back politely but the bigger ones went grandly on, paying no attention to her pleasant advances. Maxwell watched her carefully for he had never before taken such a long journey alone and he realized that he must use caution if he did not want to be upset. Also, he was anxious to get back early because he was quite uneasy about the men who had visited the Island and did not like the idea of leaving the others alone any longer than he could help. He would not have gone except that it was necessary to get word of their safety to their mother, who would surely be distressed if she did not hear from them. Out in the more open water the breeze was brisker than near the Island and the boat required his con-

centrated attention, and got it. The bay was a bit rough and several times the boy wondered if he would not have been wise to remain on the Island until he was more familiar with handling the sail, but he kept on and on, and was glad to see a number of people out enjoying the glorious weather in various kinds of craft. In case anything happened some of them would come to his aid.

Of course he did not know the best route, but set his course as well as he could, following the buoys that bobbed about on the water warning him of shallows and rocks to be avoided. At last the mainland arose clearly before him and he followed the shore line, believing that he would find a post-office where the residents were close together. Suddenly he spied a long pier where several large boats were fastened. Probably there would be someone about who could direct him. He sailed close to the shore and shouted to a man who stood at the end of the pier watching him:

"May I land here?"

"Yes," the man told him.

Maxwell brought the boat in gracefully and tossed a rope to the man who obligingly came to meet him. "Am I near the post-office?" Maxwell asked.

"'Bout two blocks," the man told him.

"Thanks a lot for helping me. I want to get

some letters mailed and was not sure where to go."

"This is Orient and you are in plenty of time to catch the mail," the man said, adding, "I'm staying around here for a while and will watch your boat, but it's safe enough."

"That's awfully good of you."

"Nothing at all. Just run up to the end of the dock and turn to your left. On the left hand side going up, you'll see the sign."

Maxwell started quickly, hurried along the street and had no difficulty locating the place he wanted. He took his letters, dropped them in the box, then bethought himself to ask, "Anything here for Ingram? We are staying at Black Eagle Island."

The postmaster was a tall thin chap, deliberate in his movements, and he took out a package of mail which he examined before handing a part of it through the narrow window. "Guess this is yours," he said in a friendly way. "Better see if it is," he added.

There were several letters from school friends and one from Father. "It's ours," Maxwell answered happily.

"Here's a package for Ingram," a woman in the back called out as she brought it to him. She was a stout woman, with a queer cast in her eyes that made her seem to be looking away from him. Her hair was bobbed and frizzy about her

ears. There were two small scars on her face, near her nose, as if some tourist had chiseled off a scrap for a souvenir. She did not drawl as the postmaster did, but spoke in a high shrill voice that seemed to echo about the tiny office.

Maxwell thanked her, and took a moment to look around. He noticed a tall man standing near the counter eyeing him queerly. The man was well dressed in linen knickers, silk shirt, light coat and long dark tie fastened with a pearl clasp. He did not wear a hat and although there were a number of people coming in and out of the office, he did not seem to see one of them. When he realized that Maxwell was looking at him, the man withdrew his gaze and left the place, jamming a letter that he had been reading into his pocket. Outside he hopped into a good-looking roadster parked across the street and disappeared around the nearest corner. Maxwell wondered why he should attract the attention of the stranger, and if the man was in any way connected with the two men that had puzzled them so much, but he did not seem at all like their visitors, although the boy had to admit in slicker and boots he would make a very different appearance.

Maxine had asked him to buy some bread, if he found a store. There was one next door, so the boy went in and made his purchases from a little old man who wore a huge, soft, wide-brimmed

straw hat, a checked shirt, and his belt so tight that it made him look for all the world like a plum pudding with a string tied around the middle. Maxwell walked slowly back toward the dock, partly to see if the stranger should put in a second appearance, and partly to enjoy the quaint winding street with its low, weather-beaten houses, some of them half covered with roses, and all of them surrounded with jolly little gardens and lilac bushes. He knew that both his mother and father would admire the colorful scene with its background of water, and determined to observe as much as possible so he could tell them about it in his next letter. Dad would love to paint it and Mother would call it an " ideal story setting." But the boy could not linger too long, so he went back to the wharf where he found that in his absence two great trucks had been hauled up and a dozen men were busily loading barrels of potatoes into boats. The barrels were lifted off the wagons, received by a man on the dock, whirled out of the way by another worker, while a third fitted a burlap cover and a hoop over the end, and still another man fastened the points of a great pair of tongs that lifted the barrel into the air and deposited it easily in the hold of the boat, where it was fitted snugly. The tongs were operated by a man on the boat, who seemed to be paying no attention to what he was doing, but he guided them to

the exact point where the barrel was to be deposited.

A short stout man, without a coat, was keeping a record and Maxwell noticed that he had lost one of his legs at the knee and his trousers leg was pinned to his belt in the back. There was another man on the dock, who was taking no part in the bustle, but seemed to know everybody there. He saw Maxwell and came over to speak to him.

"That your boat?" he asked, pointing to the *Jr. Black Eagle*.

"It belongs to Black Eagle Island," Maxwell answered.

The little man smiled. "I know it," he said. "I know every boat in these parts. Lived here most of my life." He was hardly any taller than Maxwell, slender, neatly dressed, wore a long white beard, carefully combed and trimmed, and his eyes were the clearest twinkly blue imaginable. "I'm a Civil War veteran," he confided softly.

"Civil War?" Maxwell said in amazement, for although the little gentleman was not young, he certainly did not look so old as that.

"I'm eighty-six. My name is on the monument up the road. There are only two of us left. I was shot through the thigh. I got the bullet in my pocket," he declared.

"Really?" Maxwell said, hoping he would see

the queer relic but not quite knowing how to go about it.

" Yes," the little man answered, producing a wee tan leather purse with a metal clasp. He opened it and took out a piece of flattened lead, about half an inch in diameter, and also a perfect bullet showing the actual size and shape of the thing before it had entered his body. " It went in my left side and almost through. When they brought me to the hospital the doctors said I was a 'goner.' My cousin was shot the same day. They put him in the bed next to mine and said he'd be all right in a few days, but gangrene set in on him and he died in two weeks and I ain't a 'goner' yet." He smiled reminiscently.

" That's wonderful," Maxwell declared.

" Yes," the old man admitted. " I was feeling a lump in my left leg and I told the doctor about it. He looked at it a minute, poked it hard with his fingers, got his knife, made a slit and pulled her out, just like that, and gave it to me and here I am."

Maxwell held out his hand. " That is splendid. I am a boy scout, sir, and I should like to shake your hand. It's great to meet you and see the bullet. I hope I get another chance to talk with you, but I must get back to Black Eagle Island."

" Better hurry; it's going to storm presently,"

the old man remarked to Maxwell's great surprise.

"Storm?" he exclaimed. "Why, the sky looks beautiful."

"Yep, she does, but it's going to storm just the same and I shouldn't wonder if it was a right smart breeze before it gets through."

He spoke confidently but Maxwell found it hard to believe his prophecy. His attention was caught by the appearance of the stranger who had watched him so closely in the post-office and getting an inspiration, he asked:

"Do you know who that man is?"

The old soldier looked after the car indifferently. "I ain't seen him here lately, but time back I seed him drivin' one of the summer folks' car. Don't recall whose, but I ain't real taken with his looks. Any time you want to see me, I'm Jim Edwards, they call me Captain Jim, an' everybody in these parts knows me. Better hurry along to your boat," he suggested.

"Thank you, sir, I will," and saluting Captain Jim respectfully, Maxwell made haste to the *Jr. Black Eagle* and soon had her off.

He noticed that although the sky was still a lovely blue, with hardly a cloud to mar its bright surface, the wind was higher than it had been earlier in the morning and the boat skimmed swiftly across the harbor as if realizing that speed was necessary. Swiftly over the water she

sped and Maxwell had his hands full keeping her lee rail up, for the wind would catch the sail and dip her dangerously. Soon clouds began racing through the sky, getting heavier and darker as they came, and the wind rose steadily, lashing the water higher and higher, sending huge whitecaps plunging over the billows.

For a few minutes the approaching storm wavered and held off, and soon Maxwell was relieved to see the outlines of Black Eagle Island with its great rocky cliffs loom protectingly before him. He caught a glimpse of his brothers and sisters waiting for him on the beach, the wind blowing their clothing close about them, and brandishing their ties as if to greet him. He kept his eyes on the dock, and in a short time brought the boat safely in.

The five clambered about him with eager questions. "Wait until I tie up," he told them, and when the gallant little boat was all shipshape, he came back to them.

"Get any letters?" they wanted to know.

"I reckon I did," he laughed, handing them to Maxine.

"Let's go to the house; it looks as if it may rain," Maxine said.

"I'll join you in a minute. I'm going to put Bess in the barn," Maxwell answered.

It certainly did rain. The storm came racing across the water like a sheet and before they

could reach the porch, it was coming down in torrents. Great drops that splashed deep into the soil. The wind whirled about the trees, twisting their branches and bending their sturdy trunks as if they were saplings. The children rushed to close the windows but fortunately few of them had been opened that morning and the storm did no damage.

"When do we eat?" Maxwell asked, coming in drenched.

"Right away," Nancy hastened to assure him.

"Better get out of those wet clothes," Maxine reminded him.

"We thought you would be hungry," Carrol added.

Later, seated around the table, the first sharp edge of appetites appeased, the Half Dozen read their letters. The first was from Aunt Phœbe and was a stiff little note assuring them that she considered camp life detrimental to the young and that the calming influence of a quiet household would have been more beneficial than a summer on Black Eagle Island. However, she enclosed a money order for twenty-five dollars and trusted they would not regret their choice.

"Isn't she the old brick?" Maxwell laughed.

"She is. What shall we do with the money?" Nancy demanded.

Maxine tore a sheet of paper from a pad,

found a pencil and after writing something across the top, folded the edge and handed it over to Francis, who sat next to her. Francis also wrote something across the sheet and passed it to Nancy. So it went around the table because this was the way the Half Dozen always decided things that affected them all. The sheet came to Maxwell last and he wrote.

"Everybody in on this?" he asked.

"Yes, open it up and then we will finish our letters," Nancy urged.

Maxwell opened the sheet and frowned solemnly. "I find," he said, "that there is a great difference of opinion as to how the Half Dozen shall dispose of Aunt Phœbe's twenty-five dollars."

The others watched him in distress. "How is the vote?" Robert wanted to know.

"There are six votes cast," Maxwell teased. "I find that three of them are in favor of sending the money to Mother and Dad, two of them propose sending the money to Dad and Mother, while the last vote is for sending the money to Dad for Mother."

"Then that's settled. Now let's read our letters," Carrol said with a sigh of relief.

Maxwell refolded the votes and pinned them to the money order to be sent on later. Dad wrote:

"DEAR LITTLE HALF DOZEN OF US:

Hope this finds you having a good time and enjoying Black Eagle Island. We are eager to hear from you about all the things you find to do. Mother and I had a splendid trip on the boat and now her Ladyship is resting in a remarkable swinging seat that is built exactly right for solid comfort. Just a few feet away is a wee round pond, edged with nice pointy rocks, where forget-me-nots are climbing industriously. Also, several hens and their chickens are peeking up through the sand and spreading themselves out like old-fashioned ladies with hoop skirts. Inside the pond are a dozen goldfish, if you please. Beauties. Some of them keep darting around very busy and important. They belong to the younger set, I take it, but the bigger ones remain calmly under the leaves of the lily pads, and only come out when something of great importance is taking place, like a bug lighting on the water. Then they all go for him with real family pride, and he is lucky if he doesn't do a Jonah in their several insides.

The wonderful climate is bringing a whole flock of rosebuds into your mother's cheeks, still delicate pink rosebuds, to be sure, but very promising. I should not wonder if they will be quite dark by the time I bring her home again, and they may be so gay that she will have to put a veil on, lest some of the flowers accuse her of stealing their secret of perfect coloring.

Your venerable Dad is well, thank you, and able to drag himself around the garden every day, twice, mind you, with your august mother.

Enclosed is a sketch, but it does not do justice to the scene, and I shall send you others from time to time.

Regards to Osric and Bargulus.

Must leave a space for Mother.

Best love,
DAD."

"DEAR BABIES:

I am getting well just as fast as I can because I want to hurry and be with you again, my darlings. Next letter will be longer. Love and kisses to you all.

MOTHER."

"Gee, she is getting well, all right." Francis jumped up and danced around the room and the rest promptly joined him.

"She wrote that herself, and when she went away she couldn't hold a pencil," Carrol sang happily.

"And she walks around the garden twice, mind you," Maxine added. "Isn't it just great!"

The other letters were quickly read. There was no word regarding Jane and after wondering about it for a while, they turned on the radio and listened to a tea room concert because it was still raining hard and much too stormy to play outside. Maxine wandered into the library which was a delightful room with a wide fireplace, big comfortable chairs and books lining

almost all of the wall space. Maxwell joined her and told her of his experience in Orient, the lovely hamlet, the kindly old veteran, and the stranger who stared at him when he asked for the mail and said they were stopping at Black Eagle Island.

"Did he look anything like the men who were here?" Maxine asked.

"I couldn't tell, but he certainly gave me a good look, both in the post-office and when I was on the dock talking with Captain Jim."

"Do you think we should let Father know just how things are?"

"I'd been thinking that all morning, but no one has really been near us, Maxes, and after Dad's letter, it would be a shame to spoil things," her brother answered thoughtfully.

"We have waited this long, we may as well wait a day or so more and see what Captain Oakley has to say," Maxine added.

"If we don't see anything more of those men, I'll take another trip to Orient the first of the week, and if Captain Oakley isn't back yet, I'll try to locate Captain Howe."

"That will be best, I'm sure," Maxine agreed and renewed her search among the books. It was a fine collection and one section of the library was devoted to very old editions, read and loved by long-ago Nelsons. "These are awfully interesting, Maxes, just look," she called.

Maxwell came and examined the book in her hand. It was a sort of diary; a few of the dates were in the sixteen hundreds and were records of happenings in the family and among their friends. There were letters whose delicate writing was dimmed with age and the paper was greatly discolored. After a little struggle with the early English f's, and the s's, and final e's, the twins were able to read one notation, which was plainer than the others. The writer, David Nelson, told of a horse trade which he considered eminently successful. It went on about the rising prices of food, and lamented that if the rates continued to soar it would be impossible for a man to purchase a pig under a shilling.

"My goodness, we pay more than that for a chop," Maxine laughed.

They read further that David Nelson had built a fire at Fireplace Point which was an invitation to some of his friends, from whose homes the signal was visible, to pay him a visit.

"So that is how Fireplace Point originated. They must have used it in place of a telephone and I suppose they had a system of making the smoke rise or spread low, as the Indians did, when they wanted to save themselves a trip or there were signs of danger," Maxwell exclaimed with delight.

"Let's call the others in and show them."

"All right, but let's not say anything about

the chap I saw in the village. No use making them nervous."

"I won't," Maxine agreed and they called their brothers and sisters from the living-room.

"We have found a treasure," Maxwell declared and showed them the old book.

"Be careful, don't handle it, because it is valuable and we don't want anything to happen to it while we are here," Maxine warned.

The children were thrilled and examined the quaint writing with delight. It was remarkably well done and at the end of records, flourishing designs, birds, scrolls, and fancy signatures decorated the pages.

"My, didn't they write well in those days?" Francis remarked.

"They certainly did. Dad would like to see this; he can do all of those fancy, wavy things."

The rest of the day was divided between listening to the radio and browsing in the library. Late in the afternoon it began to thunder, grew dark, and ragged streaks of lightning split the sky, leaving it darker than before. Then the Half Dozen did wish that Dad was with them, or even Jane, for it was dreadfully lonely being in the great house all by themselves and a storm raging outside.

"I say," said Maxwell, "let's get some wood from the lean-to and build a fire in this fireplace."

" Good idea. You build the fire, and we'll set the table in here and eat supper. It will be nice and cozy," Maxine answered.

From the lean-to the boys soon came with their arms filled with driftwood and kindling. Maxwell whittled some shavings with his scout knife and in a few minutes a cheerful blaze was crackling merrily. Nancy discovered a low, old-fashioned table with drop leaves. This was placed near the hearth and covered with a bright yellow serving set edged with blue.

" Guess this belonged to a grandmother Nelson," Maxine declared as they admired the happy effect.

Supper was served as soon as it was ready and the children laughed when Osric sniffed the fire and then curled himself comfortably on the round braided rug, as close as he could get with safety. Bargulus, too, approved of the fire and stretched out with his nose on his paws, and blinked at the flames. He did not stir until the children had finished and his own meal was ready. Then Maxwell got into his slicker, took a lantern and pail, and went out to care for Bess, who greeted him with a low, glad " Moo " of welcome.

" Sorry I kept you waiting, old girl," Maxwell apologized as he filled the manger. " Now all ready," he told her getting the stool and petting her gently. " You are a great old cow

and I wish we could have you in New York but I guess city life would not please you so very much, especially in an apartment," he laughed.

Maxwell was becoming quite proficient as a milkman and quickly filled the pail. Then he gave Bess another petting, offered her a bucket of water from the barn pump, and when she had all she wanted, he made her comfortable for the night.

Fastening the door tight, he picked up the lantern and milk and started back to the house. It was pitch dark and the dim lantern light cast uncertain shadows over the wet ground. To keep the milk from getting full of rain, Maxwell started to run, caught his foot under a bit of root, tripped, and down he went, with the milk on top of him. Luckily he was able to hold the lantern upright and the light did not go out, but the pail went rolling and clattering down the path, spreading its contents everywhere. The boy sprang up and rescued it, but when he got to the kitchen he had less than a pint left.

"Thought I'd take a milk bath," he announced to his sister who was waiting for him.

"Good gracious, Maxes, what happened?" Maxine demanded, hustling to give him a towel.

"Tripped," he laughed, adding, "no bones broken but the pail suffered and the milk, most of it, is running away with the rain."

"Good thing you wore your slicker," Maxine said.

Soon Maxwell joined the others in the warm library, where Nancy had piled on extra logs, and in a few minutes he was feeling "as comfortable as the cat," he told them.

The next morning the sun smiled gaily on a nice clean world, but the weather was cool, so the children built the fire again.

The middle of the day was warmer, so they played down on the beach, but Maxwell did not take the boat out because the breeze was quite stiff. Once they caught a glimpse of the mysterious motor-boat racing through the water, cutting the waves and leaving a great trail of foam in her wake. Not long after that a sail-boat came alongside of the dock. There was a young man in her. He had a huge nose, wore thick spectacles and his forehead and chin looked as if they wanted to get away from his face.

"May I have a drink of water?" he called.

"I'll get you one," Francis answered and started for the house.

"Don't go to all that trouble, I can come ashore," the chap answered affably.

"It's no trouble at all," Maxine assured him.

"Less trouble than tying your boat and getting out," Maxwell added, because he caught a glimpse of a bottle, still half full of water, on the

bottom of the boat and was suspicious of the fellow.

"This is a nice place you have here," the man remarked pleasantly.

"Yes, we think so," Maxwell answered.

"Nice dog you have there," the man went on.

"Yes, he doesn't like strangers," Maxwell answered, getting an inspiration.

The man had put a foot over the side of the rail. "Keep him off," Maxwell softly told the dog, who promptly bristled his back and took a menacing step toward the sailboat. The man quickly drew in his foot.

"Can't you tie him up, or tell him to be quiet?" the man asked.

"Oh, yes, but he'd make an awful fuss and probably break his chain," Maxwell answered indifferently, and Bargulus played up to the part assigned him by giving a low, hungry growl.

Just then Francis returned with the water. "Thanks awfully," the stranger said as he took the glass and slowly drank its contents.

"Been here long?" he wanted to know.

"Quite a while," Maxwell answered promptly.

"You the only one who has a tongue?" the man asked impudently, but Maxwell did not answer and neither did the others, so handing the glass back, the chap leisurely prepared to leave.

"Go for him," Maxwell whispered to the crouching Bargulus, and the dog, glad to receive

the order, sprang across the wharf. He landed near the edge and would have made another leap at the boatman, but the man gave himself a strong shove from the dock and was carried quickly out of harm's way, leaving Bargulus racing furiously up and down, until Maxine assured him:

"It's all right, old fellow," so Bargulus promptly became his gentle self and frisked happily about as the Half Dozen petted and praised him.

"I think he wanted to come ashore and find out all about us," Maxwell told the others.

They sat on the beach and watched the boat sail out toward the Sound and later they saw it returning toward the mainland, and again the mystery was discussed but no solution could be found.

CHAPTER V

A BOMBARDMENT

MONDAY morning Maxwell waked at five o'clock just in time to see the sun rise, like a huge gold disk, in the east. He had determined to go early to Orient and find out, if he could, something about Captain Oakley or Captain Howe. He had just started to dress when his sister heard him.

"Good-morning, Maxes. I'll get breakfast in a jiffy. I wish some of us were better milkers, then you wouldn't need to wait," she whispered.

"That's all right; it won't take long. Some of the others can tie Bess out in the grass. That will help."

Although the two were as quiet as could be with their dressing, they hardly reached the kitchen before Nancy came sliding down the banisters.

"The top of the morning to you, Sir and Lady," she laughed.

"Thought I left you sound asleep," Maxine scolded good-naturedly.

"You didn't and I did some hopping as soon

as you got out of the room. Think you Maxes are going to do all the work on this deserted Island? Guess not. What would Dad say to the rest of us?" Nancy demanded.

"That's right, what would he say?" Francis broke in. "I say, Maxes, can't I go to Orient with you? It would be lots better if two of us went."

"I wanted you to stay with Maxine."

"Well, I'll be with Maxine, and so will Nancy and Carrol," Robert chimed in as he appeared, very tousled as to head.

"It might be a help," Maxwell agreed.

"'Course it would," insisted Francis.

"That's settled. We thought we would have to have a consultation over it," Nancy told them.

"That sounds to me as if you had a consultation over it and we were not invited."

"We did," Carrol admitted solemnly, "and it was our opinion that half of the Maxes should not be let do things alone."

Maxine put her arms about the wee girl and kissed her soft cheek. "You are dears, all of you," she told them.

"Anyway we are glad you accept our decision," Robert answered, putting his arm about his biggest sister. "What would Dad say if we didn't take the proper care of you?" he mimicked.

So they hurried to prepare the meal, care for

Bess and bring in the milk. Maxwell showed them where he took his tumble the night before.

"Nice lumpy spot," Nancy remarked.

"Too bad we couldn't have had seats for the exhibition," Francis said.

"Going to do it to-night?" Robert wanted to know innocently.

"That will do, let up," roared Maxwell, making a lunge at his small tormentors who gleefully dodged him. "I'll race you to the beach," he shouted. Instantly they were in line, and off they started yelling happily. Nancy and Maxwell arrived, neck and neck as it were, with Francis close at their heels and Robert bringing up the rear. They found Carrol and Maxine awaiting them.

"Look at that sailboat," Carrol called pointing to a sloop whose mainsail and topsail were so dark and weather-stained that they looked almost black. She was built low, and as she drew nearer they could see that she was painted black.

"See her name," Francis shouted and across her bow, in clear white letters, they read *The Black Eagle.*

"She's an old one, all right. Our little boat must have been named for her. Wonder if she has anything to do with Black Eagle Island?"

But the ancient *Black Eagle* plowed her way steadily through the water toward the light and

seemed not at all interested in the island or its young inhabitants.

"If I see Captain Jim I shall ask him about her. He knows every boat in these waters. Where is my first mate?" Maxwell demanded.

"Right here," Francis answered, so the two boys got their own *Jr. Black Eagle* under way, and waving to the others they set sail and in a few minutes left the Island far behind.

The water was calm and the boys made fine progress. Having taken the trip before, Maxwell followed the course quite expertly and gave his small brother a lesson in general boat management and that young man proved himself a very apt scholar. In good time they arrived at the town dock. Here all was bustle and confusion. Trucks of potatoes were coming and boats with their holds open, like great mouths, received the barrels as fast as they could be swung over them. Francis was interested and amazed at the number of barrels the boats could carry and would have liked to stay and watch them. Maxwell was a little disappointed because Captain Jim was not there, but when they landed he asked the one-legged man who did the counting:

"Can you tell me where Captain Oakley lives?"

"His place is on the Sound shore, almost straight across from here. Follow the main road up to the monument, turn to your right and walk

until you come to a red barn half covered with ivy. Turn up the road just this side of that and go on through the woods. Keep to the left and don't turn off and it will take you to his place," the man answered, keeping his eyes on the barrels and not missing a count as he talked.

"Thanks," Maxwell answered.

The two boys followed the winding street past the post-office. Maxwell pointed out the little old houses that looked as if they might have been built a hundred or more years ago. They reached the tall monument erected for brave soldiers who had served in the Civil War. They turned to the right, following a wide, well-built main road, lined on both sides with great trees whose branches stretched half-way across. They passed a number of small farms where men were busy digging potatoes, cultivating great beds of onions, or planting sprouts because the rich soil yielded two crops yearly and when the first one was harvested the land was made ready for the second. In half an hour they saw the red barn with its lovely green covering and turned to the left on the road that passed it. The way led them between two farms and was flanked on both sides by acres of potatoes, ready to pick. Further along they reached an elevation and were soon in the heart of a delightful forest, cool and beautiful. Blackberry bushes grew in clusters, and they stopped to pick some of the fruit that

had ripened. The shiny berries were sweet and delicious but the boys did not linger long to enjoy them. On they went, keeping to the left and passing numberless inviting trails. In the woods the birds were singing a wonderful chorus. Occasionally they heard a woodpecker industriously going after some borer that threatened to blight the tree. Into tiny ravines they went, then up bits of hill until finally the road wound around in a half circle and brought them out back of an immense old barn. Before them were a dozen giant cherry and apple trees which nearly concealed the wee farmhouse with its bit of garden and thick lilac bushes.

"Isn't this nice?" Francis said almost in a whisper because the place was so still and peaceful.

"Yes. It must be Captain Oakley's," Maxwell answered and they followed the well-beaten path to the house. It brought them to a kitchen door, but it was closed and the blinds at the windows were drawn as if no one were at home. Maxwell knocked, but the sound was hollow and no response came from inside.

"Let's find another door," Francis suggested, so they walked around and although they discovered four doors and knocked on all of them, they received no answer.

"It certainly looks deserted," Maxwell had to admit.

"Let's wait a while. Someone may come," Francis said and they sat down on the tiny stone stoop at the side. It was covered with Dorothy Perkins roses rambling gaily over the posts and roof.

"Are you looking for Captain Oakley?" It was a boy's voice and Maxwell turned to see a little fellow in overalls eyeing them.

"Yes. Will he be home soon?" Maxwell asked.

"No. His daughter is very sick, maybe she won't get well, so the captain and Mrs. Oakley are staying in New Jersey. My folks are looking after the place," the boy told them.

"We knew his daughter wasn't well last week but we thought he was going to stay with her only a few days," Maxwell told the boy.

"My mother got a letter from Mrs. Oakley on Saturday and they may not be back for a month. I'm Norman King and we live over there." He pointed through the trees to a house only a short distance away.

"My name's Maxwell Ingram and this is my brother Francis. We are staying at Black Eagle Island. Do you know where we can find Captain Howe?"

"He went fishing with some summer people last Friday over Montauk way. They always stay two weeks and sometimes longer," Norman explained.

Maxwell whistled. "We wanted to find out if he met our housekeeper last week. She started from New York the same day we did, only later in the afternoon, and Captain Oakley said Captain Howe would bring her to the Island, but he didn't come and we wanted to find out something about it," Maxwell said.

Norman was thoughtful a moment. "Oh, I know. There are six of you, the Half Dozen. Captain Howe was up here and he said your housekeeper didn't come. He stayed at the Point until the last train came in, and thought she must have changed her mind, but he came up to leave word with Captain Oakley. He asked one of the other men at the Point to take her out when she did come. Didn't she come at all?"

"No," Francis admitted, "we haven't heard from her."

"That's too bad," Norman said sympathetically.

"Well, I guess we'd better go back. Thanks for telling us," Maxwell said. "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," Norman answered.

Leaving the house the two Ingrams took a trail which looked like the one that had brought them and they were both too busy with thinking about what they had heard to notice it was different. It took them straight over the hill and around through the woods and was overgrown

in places with low shrubs. Suddenly Maxwell stopped and looked around.

"This isn't the way we came," he declared.

"That's right, it isn't," Francis added, taking a close survey of their surroundings. "The other was more open than this."

"That stretch of woods we came through isn't very wide so all the paths must lead out somewhere," Maxwell reasoned.

"It might take longer to go back," Francis added.

"Yes, let's keep on," Maxwell said, so they continued and soon came to a branch that was more traveled. They followed this and it led them over a rocky way and at last to an old dim road where the trail disappeared. The road went on through the woods, up a hill, and as they both kept a sharp lookout they discovered they were passing a deep hollow grown thick with cedars, and they spied a number of broken grey stones, a few of them standing but many of them almost fallen over. "It looks like an old burying ground. Let's go in."

They climbed a crumbling stone fence overgrown with vines and briers which were so thick they could hardly get through. They scratched their hands before they landed on the damp ground on the other side of the wall, but the place they were in was so interesting they quickly forgot their hurts. It truly was an old burying

ground, deep and hollow, like a bowl, and the overhanging trees permitted only the tiniest streaks of sunshine to penetrate the heavy foliage. The wall had been built all around the top and at one side was a small house, with one wee window in the side and a low door that had once been fastened with a chain and lock, but the weather had worn away the iron and it fell apart when they touched it. The door swung open toward the inside, sagging crazily on its weak hinges. The boys could see a few old tools, a shovel and a box with smaller tools that looked as if they had not been touched in generations. The floor of the little house was rotting and parts of it cracked and broke under their feet.

"Let's go out and read what it says on some of the stones," Maxwell said, so carefully closing the door, and propping it so it couldn't open, they went back to the little community of the dead. Many of the headstones were splitting and the inscriptions on some were so dim they could not be read, but others were plainer. They were decorated with weird carvings of heads with wings at the sides, and many of the names were familiar to Maxwell in American history. All of the dates were during the sixteenth century and two they discovered were as early as sixteen hundred and forty. The wealthier families had tombs with large, flat stones raised over them, but they had long ago sunk into the ground and

the story of the man or woman lying beneath could not be deciphered. Maxwell tried to scratch off the earth that covered the letters but succeeded in making out only a couple, and not the whole name or history.

"Gee, wouldn't the rest like to see this?" Francis whispered.

"Perhaps we can bring them over sometime," Maxwell answered. "We'd better go now, for it is getting late."

Quietly they climbed through the wall. It was good being back in the sunshine of the rocky road, and because they had delayed so long, they trotted briskly and in a little while came out of the woods at an old gateway. They could see the harbor in the distance, the spires of the hamlet churches, and at last they located the tall monument through the trees and set their route toward that. The path led them through a farm and finally they reached the main road. In a short time they came to the monument, where they turned down toward the post-office. They stopped for mail and to send another letter to Dad and Mother that Maxwell had in his pocket and then they sprinted for the *Jr. Black Eagle.* It was noon and the boats that had been loading in the morning were gone with their cargoes. They climbed into the boat and started her off toward home. The wind was in their favor and they sailed gracefully across the smooth harbor

and before one o'clock were tying up at their own dock. Their brothers and sisters had seen them coming and were waiting.

"Hurry up, Maxes. There's something doing on the Sound," Robert called.

"What is it?"

"We don't know; listen."

They did and in a moment heard a great boom that seemed to shake the Island.

"Sounds like some kind of blasting," Maxwell remarked.

"Come on in to lunch, then we'll investigate," Maxine said.

At lunch Maxwell told of their visit to the Oakleys, and of the ancient burying ground. When they were finished the children went cautiously in the direction of the old boat-house. They thought perhaps the mysterious men were there again, but when they caught a glimpse of the house it was just as they left it a few days ago. Then came a whirring of immense motors.

"Airplanes," Maxwell exclaimed and studying the sky he located two, but they were hydroplanes and were going swiftly toward the Sound.

The children reached an open spot where they could get an unobstructed view of the water and the sight that met their eyes made them exclaim with delight. There were four solemn grey cruisers and some distance out was an old wreck which was being used as an immense target.

Hydroplanes, eighteen in all, were circling in the air or dashing through the water.

"It's target practice. Oh, what a sight!" Maxine cried out.

The Half Dozen sat down to watch the wonderful demonstration. One of the planes was anchored a distance from the ship and from the top of its wings they could see a man with a flag in each hand and every few minutes he stood up and signaled. Then one or two of the planes would dash through the water, rise lightly and go soaring through space until it was above the target, where the bomb it carried was dropped with a terrific bang.

"That's what we heard," Nancy cried excitedly.

"And we thought it was robbers on the Island," Robert laughed.

The airships would come sailing back over one of the cruisers then land on the water, and a speed boat would hurry to its side and reload it. Each one of the planes had red, white and blue painted on its tail, and as the time passed, the children could hear the hour bells ringing on the cruisers.

It was a perfectly gorgeous spectacle and a number of private boats nosed their way out from the mainland to see what was going on. Occasionally, the Half Dozen heard cheers from the spectators when an especially good shot was

made. They cheered too, and picked out favorites from among the planes that were scooting busily about the air and water. By this time there were a great many pleasure boats hovering as near as the government boats would permit until it seemed as if the Sound were alive with people. Their voices came over the water, but the children could not make out what was said. They watched and listened so long that they got tired and stretched out in some tall grass where they could still get a fine view of what was taking place. Several times hydroplanes soared over their heads and disappeared toward the harbor, making a great noise as they went.

Suddenly Maxwell, who lay with his elbows on the earth and his chin in his hands, raised his head cautiously.

"Don't move," he said to the others, who were all well concealed.

"What is it?" Maxine whispered, but she need not have been so careful because the bombs and planes were making so much noise that it would have drowned her voice.

"That sailboat. It's the fellow who came and asked for a drink of water and there's another chap with him. They are in bathing suits."

The children peeked through the grass and soon picked out the little boat tacking lazily toward the shore. They watched it sail up and down until it finally slowed up opposite the boat-

house, when one of the men jumped into the water and swam leisurely to the beach. He dived around as if playing, but the children could see the chap in the boat examining the shore through his field-glasses, then he dropped a handkerchief and the man in the water came out onto the beach. He sat down as if to dry himself and the boat sailed slowly out into the Sound. After several minutes the man walked indifferently around the boat-house, then suddenly popped inside. It seemed a long time before he came out again, and when he did he carried a tiny box in hand, and fastened it securely to his belt. Assuring himself that no one had seen him, he plunged back into the water and swam away. The sailboat picked him up, quite a distance out, and in a few minutes it was bowing to right and left, as it passed around the other boats making its way further along the Sound until it was lost to sight.

"Those fellows are hiding things in that boat-house," Maxwell declared. "I'm going down and see. The rest of you would better stay here because they might come back and spot us all with their glasses."

Maxwell ran swiftly down to the quiet little house and found that a padlock had been put on the door. Determined to get something out of the whole affair, the boy dived into the water, and swam into a narrow canal that ran under the

house. Noiselessly he shoved aside the loose boards that served as a flooring and raised himself inside the room. At first he did not see a thing, but he looked about carefully. He had nearly decided that there was nothing there, when he spied some broken pieces of oar lying on a cross-beam. He climbed up and removed them. There was a hole in the beam, and lifting off some bits of sawdust and shavings, he discovered a box, about two inches wide and deep, and five inches long. He was about to open the box when he heard a series of catcalls and recognized them as coming from Francis. They had used the call last year when they were at camp together and it meant " Watch your step." Hastily Maxwell stuffed some bits of wood into the hole in the beam, covered it with the sawdust and shavings and replaced the pieces of oar. Again came the call. Persistent and with a different meaning. " Hurry, hurry," it warned.

Maxwell dropped to the floor, slipped between the planks and quickly replaced them, then, realizing that the boat would probably be coming from the direction of the Sound, he wriggled noiselessly along the narrow canal, the metal box tucked in his bathing suit. He reached the end of the building. Only the noises of the planes and bombs came to him. Not a sound from his brothers and sisters, but after a moment he heard the catcall again. " Keep out of sight," it told

him, so Maxwell kept under the edge of the boat-house. After a while he heard the rest of the Half Dozen, shouting and laughing to each other, as if they were playing high up on the bank. At first he thought everything must be all right and was going to come out, but the cat-call still warned him to keep out of sight. He listened to the voices of the others and after a while they seemed to be going home. He could hear them further and further away, until he was sure the children must be almost to the house. They were singing as they went, then they seemed to change their minds and came back laughing and shouting merrily. He knew they had returned to the spot from where they watched the ships and by the noise they were making they would be in plain sight of anyone on the Sound. After several minutes more, the cat-bird chirped again.

"Coast's clear. Take care."

Maxwell was glad to hear it because his teeth were chattering with cold, so he wriggled out of the canal and wormed his way through the marshes, parting the tall grasses with utmost care lest the movement attract attention. Finally he reached the hard ground, and in a few minutes more came up to his brothers and sisters. They kept right on playing for several minutes, until Francis called, after he reached them:

" Oh, let's go home." Off they all raced, making Bargulus bark as they ran along with him. When they reached the barn, they all dropped into Bess's stall.

" Gee, what was it all about?" Maxwell demanded.

" Well, you were inside when we noticed the boat coming back in quite a hurry. We were going to shout and warn you, but Maxine said it would be better if we could warn you without letting the men in the boat know we were there, so Francis remembered the catbird calls you made up and we decided they would be the best," Nancy began.

" Yes. I gave the ' watch your step ' one first. The boat came right on fast, so I whistled for you to ' hurry.' You weren't in sight, so Maxine decided we would have to scare them away or you would be caught, so we came out on the hill as if we had just arrived. As soon as they saw us, they slowed up, and started away, so we made believe we were going to the house, and they came back. We couldn't see you anywhere, so we went back and scared them off again and when they were quite a ways out I whistled ' Coast's clear, take care.' Then we played in plain sight, making all the noise we could, until you came back to us."

" Well, you are all bricks, thanks a lot, because if I had been caught I'd have been in some cor-

ner, I tell you. Come on to the house, and some of you chaps keep watch, close watch, because if they discover I've been in the boat-house, they may come after us," Maxwell explained.

The children were wild with excitement, but they managed to play out of doors as if nothing out of the ordinary had taken place while their brother took a shower, a brisk rub, and got into warm clothing. He had been in the water a long time and not even the race home had taken the chill out of his body. Maxine heated some milk and as soon as he drank it, he got out the metal box and showed it to the other twin, telling her how he had discovered it. He ran his knife under the edge and started to open it when Maxine stopped him.

"Do you think we should open it, Maxes?" she asked.

"Yes. I believe if there is anything valuable in it, it has been stolen and we should hand it over to the authorities as soon as we can, but if it isn't of any account, there's no use going to the trouble of taking it to the police," Maxwell answered.

"That's right too," Maxine admitted.

"Here she comes," Maxwell exclaimed a bit breathlessly as the lid came off in his hand. Under the cover was a piece of newspaper and folding that back, the twins found a layer of cotton, and when they removed this Maxine clapped her

hand over her mouth to keep from crying out. The box was filled with glistening jewels, set and unset. There were rings, brooches, pendants, and bracelets that had been bent oval so they would fit into the box. There were diamonds and stones of almost every color. For a moment the boy and girl were terrified at sight of the beautiful and priceless collection.

"I'll bet someone has been stealing them for a long time and waiting to sell them when he won't be discovered," Maxine whispered as they put back the cotton and fastened down the cover.

"If Dad had a quarter of them, he could take Mother anywhere he wanted to and not bother about drawing until she is well," Maxwell sighed.

"Where had we better put it?" was Maxine's first question.

"Yes, and what had we better do about it?" Maxwell asked as they looked about the room for a good place. He spied the radio. "I have an idea. I brought a lot of wire out to experiment with coils, and a tube of bakelite, a long one. I'm going to put the jewels in that, cover them with wax and wire, and then we'll bury the box somewhere along the beach."

"That's a good plan," Maxine agreed. Hastily she deposited the box behind some of the smaller books, and swiftly Maxwell got out his radio kit. Before he left the city he had bored several holes through the tube and now he strung

it with wires. When he had it as he wanted, he put in a pasteboard cover, about two inches from the end, and sealed it well with wax, attaching some of the wire to the middle. This done the twins wrapped the jewels carefully in a handkerchief, and dropped them into the center of the tube, which was about six inches long, and the boy fitted another cover, which he sealed two inches from the end, and then he carefully wove wires back and forth, and around the outside.

"Any radio man would think this a fool kid's experiment, and any man who doesn't know about radio would never think to look here for jewels, and I suspect men who steal aren't bothering to fuss with radios. Now I'm going to take that wave trap I made, and attach this so it looks as if I'm operating it on the set."

Maxine watched as he did all this and in an hour's time the wave trap was sitting innocently behind the loud speaker, its black box and dial making it look exactly as if it were a necessary part of the receiver.

"At night, I'll tell Bargulus to watch, then he'll bark if there is anyone fooling about the place," Maxine suggested.

"Yes, we'll make him keep on the watch for strangers all of the time. He'll keep them off, especially if they are anything like our thirsty friend. Suppose we call the youngsters in for supper, but it's better not to tell them about the

wave trap. They are used to seeing my contraptions around and won't think anything of it. We'll tell them about the box, but not open it, and they can help us bury it."

The children were called in and as soon as Bess was cared for, and the evening meal over, the Half Dozen gathered in the living-room to hear of Maxwell's adventure. He told them about his find in the boat-house, and their plan to bury it until they could reach the proper authorities, and added that he and Maxine had decided it was better not to open the box again, just as a matter of safety to them all. They looked at the mysterious thing in awe, and agreed to the plan although they would like to have seen its shiny contents.

"We watched closely but no one came near the place and we didn't see the sailboat, nor the motor-boat again," Nancy assured them.

The box was returned to its hiding place behind the books, and the youngsters waited to hear the radio before turning in for the night.

"Oh," laughed Francis, "we might have known that Maxes would do something to it. Look at the wave trap. What did you do to it, Maxes?"

"Nothing; it's all set," Maxwell answered indifferently, and Nancy gave him a quick, understanding look, but whatever her suspicions were, she kept them to herself and after they listened a

while to a few of their favorite numbers, they went off to bed, giving Bargulus strict orders to:

"Watch, sir!"

The dog gave a little growl to let them know that he would take charge of the house.

CHAPTER VI

INTERLOPERS

The responsibility of the jewels weighed heavily on the minds of the twins and neither of them slept well. Once Maxwell thought he heard a noise and slipping into his bathrobe he took his flashlight and went softly downstairs. Bargulus was lying on his rug where they had left him. He opened his eyes, gave his tail a friendly wag of greeting, and the youngster was relieved to find him all right. He knew that at least one of the men thought the animal ferocious and would probably warn the others. As soon as they could, the boy figured, they would try to get the faithful fellow out of their way.

"Let's take a look around, old chap," Maxwell whispered, so with Bargulus at his heels they softly made a tour of inspection through the rooms. They found nothing to cause them alarm. The wave trap was safe, the windows were all secure, as well as the doors, and no sound reached them except the wind in the trees and the steady beating of the waves. A storm was coming up and the wind rattled loose boards, making a weird hammering sound. "Guess they haven't suspected yet," Maxwell whispered, but

he decided to spend the rest of the night on the couch in the library. Taking one of the heavy covers, he wrapped himself up and with Bargulus at his feet he was almost asleep when he heard a step in the room. His heart almost stood still, but only for an instant.

"Maxes!" called his sister.

"I'm right here," he answered.

"I heard you come down and wondered what had happened to you."

"Everything's all right. I have tried the windows," he answered his sister.

"Do you think it is good for you to stay here? If these men did come looking here, they would be desperate and all the jewels in the world are not worth the risk," she answered. "I don't believe that Dad would want you to take such a chance."

"All right, I'll come back to bed."

The two crept upstairs taking the dog with them. "He can hear just as well in our rooms," Maxine reasoned.

For the first time since they arrived the Half Dozen slept late and immediately after breakfast they went out along the shore and finally selected a spot near Fireplace Point. They found a deep hole in one of the big trees. The hole went back into the trunk nearly a foot, so they dropped the box inside, carefully winding some vines over the opening. They tied some

long grasses on the nearest tree so they would remember the exact location and anyone else seeing the mark would have difficulty and waste considerable time before he could recover the "treasure." This done the Half Dozen strode solemnly back to the dock to talk things over.

"Would it be a good plan to write and ask Dad what to do with it?" Francis asked.

"He need not tell Mother anything about it," Nancy added.

"I've thought of that, but it's just possible that Mother would see the letter and of course she would want to hear what we wrote," Maxwell answered.

"We might put in an extra sheet to Dad if we only knew how their mail was delivered, but someone might take the letter to Mother and she would be worried to pieces because she would think we are in danger," Maxine said.

"Let's not write yet. Maybe Maxwell can find someone in Orient who will help us," Carrol suggested.

"Let's not write," Robert insisted, so it was agreed.

Later, while the others were playing in the sand, Maxwell grinned to his twin. "I have an idea," he whispered. "I'll take the wave trap over to the post-office and get the man to put the stuff in his safe. He's a nice chap and I bet he'll do it."

"What will you tell him?"

"Haven't made up my mind. Let's think it over."

While the two were talking a man had rowed around from the Sound side of the Island and was tying up at the dock. His boat had a small engine in one end, but he had not been using it. He started to step onto the wharf and instantly Bargulus made a furious dash for his legs, and the Half Dozen stood silently watching.

"Call your dog off!" the man said cheerfully.

"Why?" demanded Francis.

"I want to come ashore and talk with you."

He was a tall, thin man with a grave face. His hair was combed straight back from his forehead, his skin was fair, and he wore heavy bone-rimmed glasses. There was a quiet sureness in his movements that gave Maxwell confidence so the boy went to meet him and, taking Bargulus by the collar, he asked:

"What do you want?"

"My name is Pell, Philip Pell. Mind telling me yours?"

"Maxwell Ingram. Those are my brothers and sisters. We live in New York."

The man looked the boy over for a moment with an amused smile. "Any relation to the artist?" he asked pleasantly.

"He's our father," Maxwell grinned.

"Glad to know you." Pell held out his hand.

"I want to ask you some questions. Of course you need not answer them if you do not want to, but you may be able to help me, so I hope you do answer them. How long have you been here, and how do you happen to be here when the Nelsons are abroad and it was generally understood they would not use the Island this summer?"

"We have been here about a week. Mother is in a convalescing hospital and Dad is with her. Mr. Nelson wrote that we, they call us the Half Dozen, could use the Island. It saves expense and we would rather be here than with our Aunt Phœbe."

"She doesn't like dogs or cats," Carrol volunteered.

"Thank you," Pell said with a smile. "Where are the grown folk of your party?"

"There are none." Then Maxwell told him of the non-appearance of Jane and the Oakleys' sudden change of plans. "If Mother has nothing to worry her, she'll be all right in a few weeks, so we haven't told them," Maxwell explained.

"Plan to stay right here all by yourselves?" Pell questioned.

"We decided to for a while anyway," Maxine answered.

"You are fine youngsters. I expect to be around these waters for the next few weeks and will look in on you occasionally. I have a room

over in Orient any time you want to reach me, but don't let anyone know I have been asking questions. I'm supposed to be doing some marine sketches. Now, what I want to know most, have you seen any suspicious characters hanging around here since you came? Fact is, I'm looking for a gang. I shouldn't tell anyone, but I size you up as sensible children, so I'm taking a chance by telling you," Pell said and he scrawled an address on his card and handed it to Maxine.

"Come on over here and sit down," Maxwell invited. In a sheltered spot, Pell took out a pad and soft pencil and began a sketch, while Maxwell told him of the boats that had visited the Island and the old boat-house. He did not tell of his find under the bit of oar because he thought it best not to be too confiding until they were more sure of Pell, although they did not doubt his story and it was a temptation not to hand him over the jewels and be rid of them.

The young man listened attentively and asked numerous questions about the motor and sailboat and the men in them. The children answered as best they could, but when Maxwell did not tell of the jewels, none of the others mentioned them, feeling sure their brother had some good reason for withholding the information.

Finally satisfied, Pell put away his pencil. "Thanks a lot. You have given me some real

help. See that tall cedar at the end of the cliff? Well, suppose we have a signal. When you want me, you hang something big and white as high in the branches as you can. I won't come over too often but every day I'll be near enough to see that through my glasses and if you need help or get anything more that you think I'd like to know it won't take me long to get here. I'm going around now to that boat-house and give it another good examination. Anything I can do for you right away?"

"Would you mail a letter for us?" Maxwell asked. "Then I won't need to go to Orient."

"Glad to," Pell answered, so Francis ran to the house and got their last letter, which he gave to Pell.

"If Mother did not hear, she'd worry," he confided.

"She must not be allowed to worry," Pell agreed. "I'll mail it as soon as I get back and it will go out to-day. Thanks again, and don't forget if you want me, hang up the white flag," he added and getting into his boat he rowed leisurely off.

When he was gone Maxine gave a big sigh of relief. "I feel much safer now," she declared.

"Me too," Maxwell agreed. "If we decide to tell him about the jewels we can hang up the white flag or I can take them over to him."

"How about getting some berries for din-

ner?" Nancy demanded. "We ate the last ones this morning."

Soon the Half Dozen were making their merry way toward the lake. It was surprising how much better they all felt since the appearance of Philip Pell. They were no longer cut off from friends but had someone to whom they could take their perplexities if they wanted to, and the signal from the cedar would be a big help and comfort. They raced and laughed and even made believe a little. They found a good supply of berries near where they had eaten lunch a week ago and twelve busy hands fell to picking so industriously that in an hour their pails were full to the brim, and their tummies too. Their mouths and teeth were black from the juicy fruit and they grinned at each other just to show how funny they looked.

"Let's walk around the lake," Nancy begged, so they trooped along after her, stopping occasionally to skip stones across the water or paddle with their hands in its cool depths.

"Wish we could build a raft and play here sometimes," Francis remarked.

"Well, we can," Robert answered. "We can be pirates."

"Or ancient Egyptians," Carrol suggested.

"We can cover our raft with flowers and you shall be our queen," her biggest brother told her.

"We'll pay a visit to King Solomon in all his glory," Nancy added.

"I'd rather ride around among my people," Carrol answered.

"You shall do whatever you like," Maxine laughed. "That's a queen's privilege."

"And if you don't like us you can order our heads removed before breakfast," Maxwell said.

"But I do like you and I shouldn't care for any of you without your heads," the small girl told them positively.

By this time they had circled the lake and after bidding it good-bye they went on toward the shore. They had gone only a little way when through the trees, just ahead of them, they spied a thin wreath of smoke coiling lazily toward the sky, and in a moment more they came upon a brown canvas tent. On the beach they saw a small sailboat drawn well up on the sand. Keeping themselves concealed they watched and finally a boy came out of the tent and began to stir the fire.

"Spuds are almost baked," he called and another boy joined him.

"Guess I'll ask them what they are doing here," Maxwell said, so the Half Dozen walked out of their hiding place and confronted the campers.

"Why hello!" exclaimed the boy by the fire in amazement.

"Hello yourself; what are you doing here?" Maxwell demanded.

"I might ask you the same question," the boy answered defiantly.

"Have you any right to be here?" Maxwell asked.

"If I haven't, nobody else has," the boy answered.

"I say, we are not getting anywhere this way. Our name's Ingram and we are here for the summer," Maxwell told them.

"What right have you to be here for a minute?" the boy demanded hotly.

"We have a right to be here and you haven't," Nancy flared.

"Come off your perch. I own this Island," the boy told her.

The Half Dozen looked puzzled but they thought it was a joke.

"You are just making believe, aren't you?" Carrol put in.

"I am not. Dad gave it to me for my birthday," the boy insisted.

"That's right," the other boy put in; "he's Lawrence Nelson and his Dad gave him the Island. Deed and everything's in his name."

At this bit of information the Half Dozen could only stare. Finally Maxine broke the silence. "I guess we owe you an explanation then. Our name's Ingram and Mr. Nelson

wrote Father that we could spend the summer here while Mother is in the hospital. He said you were all going to Europe and wouldn't want it."

Lawrence grinned in a friendly manner. "It's big enough for all of us. I remember now, your father's an artist and your mother writes. Dad said he told you to come down, and I forgot all about it. At the last minute I persuaded them to let me stay in America and visit the Seawells. This is Herbert Seawell and I'm staying at his house."

"Both of us together persuaded Mother to let us come over here for a few days' camping," Herbert grinned.

"Come on and sit down. We are going to have lunch and there are spuds enough to go around. Herb likes to cook a lot," Lawrence invited hospitably.

"Thanks," the children accepted. "Want some berries?"

"They would be fine," Herb agreed.

"Hope you have scout knives with you because we didn't bring much silver and you will have to use your fingers for some things. But you can clean them off in nature's own finger bowl," and the boy nodded toward the water in the harbor.

Now that they understood one another the Half Dozen found Lawrence and Herbert

friendly and cordial. They were about the same age, but Lawrence was a bit taller than Herbert. They both wore grey flannel shirts and knickers. Lawrence was fair like an English boy, and Herbert was darker and they seemed to be great pals. They had a finely equipped tent and they had added a pup tent on the inland side where they kept most of their provisions.

"When did you come over?" Francis asked.

"Saturday. We planned to go to the house to-morrow, and would have discovered you. Pitch in, grub's up," Herbert invited, handing baked potatoes to his guests. The boys had baked nine, so there were more than enough to go around, but they did not explain that they had intended eating the left overs cold in the evening. Lawrence was busy with some thin strips of bacon and when they were crisp he passed them around.

"We break the potato and put the bacon inside. You can have butter, too, if you want it," Lawrence remarked.

"Guess we have been using your boat," Maxwell confessed.

"Oh, that's all right. You have to have some kind of boat. I can share Herb's. Any of your folks come with you?" Lawrence wanted to know.

They explained about Jane and the two boys listened in surprise.

"What do you suppose can have happened to her?" Herbert questioned.

"Haven't an idea. Norman King told us that Captain Howe couldn't wait for her, that she didn't come the day we expected her," Maxwell answered.

"Mother has a dickens of a time with servants. They promise all sorts of things, then don't show up," Lawrence remarked sympathetically.

"But Jane isn't like that. She's been with Mother for years and if she promised to go to Africa she'd go. Besides that, she knew Mother was depending upon her and I don't believe she would go back on us that way. I think something must have happened, but I don't understand why she doesn't let us know," Maxine defended "Old Ironsides."

"Has she got any folks?" Herbert asked.

"No, she hasn't, and we don't know any friends of hers that we could get in touch with," Maxwell admitted.

"She didn't make many friends or go places often. Dad put a radio in the kitchen for her and she'd listen to that all evening. Once in a while she'd go to the movies but not often and sometimes she'd go to church, but she liked tuning in for the Sunday services," Nancy explained.

"Well, it sure is a mystery," the boys admitted.

The camp lunch tasted great and the Half Dozen thoroughly enjoyed themselves. "Sure you don't want to come to the house?" Maxwell asked.

"Good heavens, no. This suits me right down to the ground. We can live in a house any time, but we can't always do this," Lawrence answered positively.

"Suppose it rains again and thunders," Carrol reminded them.

"We'll be as snug as bugs in a rug," Herb insisted.

"You must let us return your hospitality, and come up for dinner or supper sometime. There is always enough for two extra, and it would be fine if you will come," Maxine invited.

"We'll come," Lawrence promised promptly.

"To-morrow," Herbert added.

"Great," Francis grinned. "We have a radio."

"I say," interrupted Nancy, "how did you happen to name your boat the *Jr. Black Eagle?*"

Lawrence grinned. "Great name, isn't it? Father ordered a fine black eagle, a bird, made for me and when it comes I'm going to put it on my boat. If you get up early enough Monday mornings, you'll see a low, black sloop with two sails. That's *The Black Eagle.* She's an aw-

fully old boat. Captain Dick bought her over sixty years ago for a song, because she was an old timer then. He's had her remodeled a couple of times and has an engine in her now. I don't know what her name was before, but only a couple of years ago he named her *The Black Eagle* for our Island. I'm crazy about her and Captain Dick let me name my boat the *Jr. Black Eagle* for her. He's taken me on trips other years when we were down here and I hope to get in on one this summer. They start every Monday morning about six o'clock from Orient and sail over to Montauk where they fish, and come back Thursday and sometimes Friday."

"We saw her and wondered if she had anything to do with Black Eagle Island," Maxine told him.

"No, she really hasn't, but Captain Dick liked the name so much he asked Dad if he could call his boat that. Captain Dick's just as nice as he can be and so is his wife. They have a cook that has sailed with them for forty years or more. He's a great character too. You should hear some of the stories he tells about this part of the country."

"Ever use that boat-house on the Sound?" Maxwell asked.

"No, not in a long time. Once in a while we put up there when we have a picnic or get caught

out in a storm and it's nearer than coming around."

"We will have to be going soon," Maxine reminded her brother.

"Can't we help you clear up camp?" Maxwell wanted to know.

"Thanks. We can do it. We have camp keeping down to a science," Herbert laughed.

"Been fishing since you came?" Lawrence asked.

"No. What kind of fish do you catch?"

"Swell bellies, mostly."

"What are they like?" Nancy demanded.

"Funny little fish. They swell up when you take them out of the water and are almost as round as a ball."

"We caught some crabs but they were kind of sandy," Carrol told their hosts.

"Yes, they take a lot of cleaning, but they taste good. Sorry you have to go. Glad you looked in on us."

"We'll see you to-morrow," the Half Dozen answered.

"Sure enough!"

So the children bade each other good-bye, and when the Ingrams were gone, Lawrence remarked, "Nice bunch of kids, aren't they?"

"Yes," agreed Herbert and the Half Dozen on their way home said:

"Aren't they nice boys?"

"Hope we can get a good look at that other *Black Eagle* sometime," Maxwell announced.

The children were going slowly and quietly through the woods when suddenly they heard voices that seemed to come from the water under the cliff. They crept close to the edge and there was the mysterious sailboat, and in her were the first two men who had started to visit the Island. The boat was drifting lazily, for her sail was down. The men were talking together a bit angrily.

"There is no one on this Island but a bunch of kids. I've found that out," one declared

"Any idea how long they are staying?" the other asked.

"No, but I expect it's all summer. They brought trunks and a radio. I heard the thing going," the first one replied.

"Can we get 'em off anyway, Carl?"

"I don't know as we'd better try, Joe. I told Sam when we started to use this bunk that it was too darned public. If the police ever got in the neighborhood they'd go nosing around here first thing, especially if no one was on it."

"Well, perhaps the kids are a sort of insurance. We might make friends with them," Joe suggested.

"Jack tried that. They have a mean dog."

"Aw, Jack. He'd be afraid of a kitten if it arched its back. Besides, he went meandering

up and asked for a drink with half a bottle of water right under their noses." Joe gave a contemptuous snort.

"You don't think so much of Jack?"

"He's a weak sister. Seen any suspicious looking people about the town?"

"No. Just usual summer crowd that come here year after year. Then there's an artist guy, calls himself a marine artist. Goes around making sketches of trees and water, name's Pell and he works for an advertising agency. I looked him up."

Joe picked up a pair of glasses and swept the harbor. "There goes Sam now. We better move on."

Lazily the two men raised the sail and started the boat toward Orient. Until they were well out of sight the children on the cliff lay perfectly still, not daring to get up lest they be spied through those powerful glasses. At last they felt safe.

"Whew," Maxwell exclaimed.

"We got an earful, as the mayor's wife would say," Nancy declared.

"We certainly did, and we got some of their names. Think we better hang out the sign for Mr. Pell?" Maxine asked.

"Think they might see it and suspect something?" Francis asked.

"They might," his brother admitted. "Guess

we better wait. Anyway if he's in town he may want to keep an eye on them."

"What shall we do, Maxes, if any of them try to be friendly?" Nancy demanded.

"Perhaps we could help Mr. Pell if we pretended to like them," said Robert.

"That's so, we might. If we see him first, we'll ask him. Anyway we need not be quite so stand-offish as we were to 'Jack,'" Maxine said.

"But listen," Maxwell warned, "not a word about my find in the boat-house. Better not mention it at all, and if they do, just say we use this one, and don't go over there. You must all be very careful about that."

The children realized the importance of this and promised to do their part. "They are bound to discover the box is gone and when they do there will be the dickens of a row," Maxine said.

"They must have been around the house," Nancy said.

"Yes, they would try to find out about us, but we must not be afraid," Maxine answered quietly. "Suppose we go up now. It must be nearly time to get supper."

If the strange men had visited the place they left no trace of their presence but the children were quite sober as they went about the evening tasks. However, Maxine started a game and soon they were all happily joining in a jolly make-believe. As soon as the house was in or-

der, they tuned in on the funniest program on the air, and laughed gaily with the far-away entertainers. As Maxwell was tuning in he took occasion to examine the wave trap and assured himself that it had not been disturbed. He wished he knew the right thing to do with the stolen jewels. In New York it would be simple enough to hand them over to the police but he did not know anything about the Orient officers of the law and hesitated about asking questions. He did not know how closely the gang kept watch of his movements, and if they discovered he was looking for a constable they might get suspicious and prevent him from handing the things over. He was afraid, too, to ask the postman to put them in his safe. They might find out and blow up the safe.

"I don't think much of your wave trap," Francis told him grandly.

"I do," Nancy declared promptly. "The set works much better with it on."

"That's right, Nan, you stick up for my contraptions," Maxwell laughed. He felt sure the little girl suspected something and was glad she was taking his side.

"Oh, it's all right, only I just don't see any difference," Francis defended.

"It isn't what you see, it's what you hear," Carrol laughed.

That night the children were all restless. Once

they were awakened by Bargulus, who was barking furiously. He started downstairs, but Maxwell called him back. The dog continued to bark, the hair on his back bristling angrily, but none of the Half Dozen could make out what disturbed him. Although they listened they could not hear anything. After a long time the dog quieted somewhat, then suddenly they heard plainly a step on the porch. A second more and they heard someone running as if close to the house. They heard an oath as the unknown stumbled through the shrubbery. Bargulus barked again and Francis had all he could do to hold the animal.

"Keep him quiet," Maxwell whispered.

"Hush, old chap," Francis warned.

The children were all gathered in Maxine's room and little Carrol cuddled into bed beside her big sister

"Don't be afraid, darling, we are all right," Maxine soothed.

"I know it," she answered bravely. "God's taking care of us."

For a while things were quiet then again someone jumped onto the porch and ran the full length of it around the house unmindful of the noise he made. He jumped off onto the soft ground. Maxwell softly opened the window and stepped out onto the balcony. He was just in time to catch a glimpse of two figures strug-

gling fiercely and after a time one of them threw the other off and disappeared. The other did not try to follow but stood silently for a minute, then he called softly:

"Let your dog downstairs and make him bark. This is Pell, and you might let me in, but don't show a light anywhere."

"Turn Bargulus loose," Maxwell instructed his small brother.

"Go for them, old boy," Francis ordered and the dog needed no urging. He tore through the house barking wildly and made noise enough to drown any other sounds.

Maxwell slipped downstairs and admitted Pell, whose torn clothes showed the tussle he had just been through. He did not look at all like the indifferent chap they had met that morning. His heavy glasses were off, his hair was disarranged, and his skin was brown and deeply lined.

CHAPTER VII

VISITORS

When Maxwell opened the door Pell slipped in quickly. Bargulus dashed toward him but suddenly recognizing him, the dog stopped uncertainly and glanced at his master

"It's all right, old chap," Maxwell whispered, so Bargulus wagged his stub of a tail but continued to growl menacingly toward the windows.

"I don't believe they will be back," Pell said assuringly. "I saw some of the fellows I'm watching in Orient this afternoon, and to-night one of them started for the Island so I followed, partly to find out what he was up to and partly to see that nothing happened to you youngsters. He began trying the windows, then your dog barked and scared him a bit. He was sneaking around when he bumped right into me and I had a fine scrap with him but he got away."

By this time, the children were huddled on the stairs listening eagerly. "You were awfully good to come to help us," Maxine said gratefully.

"Do you mind waiting a bit?" Maxwell asked. "I want to speak to my sister."

"Sure," Pell answered puzzled.

Up in her room Maxwell said to his twin, "What do you think about giving him the jewels? I'm sure he's all right."

"It's a good idea. We'll get him to give us a receipt for them," Maxine answered.

"All right. You get the others back to bed and come on down in the library and we'll tell him." In the hall again Maxwell said:

"Come in here, we want to talk with you."

He led the way to the library, guiding their guest with his flashlight but being careful that it did not turn toward the window. "My sister will be right down when she gets the rest back into bed. Take a seat."

Pell sat down in one of the high-backed upholstered chairs which concealed him completely from inquisitive outsiders and the boy drew up a low stool near the radio. In a minute Maxine came in and curled up on the settee beside the fireplace. None of them were visible from the windows. They made the dog lie down near them, warning him to watch.

"When we saw you this morning we didn't tell you everything because we did not know you well enough, but we want to tell you something now," Maxwell began.

"Suppose we tell him about the men in the boat to-day before we forget," Maxine suggested so they told him what they had overheard, and

the names, and as nearly as they could what the men looked like.

"Fine," Pell answered when they had finished. "You are being a big help to me and I'm glad to know that I'm not recognized."

"We thought you might want us to let them get friendly," Maxine answered, "but we have to be careful."

"If the younger children were not with us Maxine and I could do a lot to help you find out things, but Robert is not very big and Carrol is lame and we do not want to get her mixed up in anything. But we'll do what we can," Maxwell assured Pell.

"Thanks. I wouldn't get too friendly but try not to act as if you suspect anything. That might get you into a real mess and spoil the works. Was there something else you wanted to tell me?"

"Yes." Maxwell unhooked the wave trap, then slipped softly over to the windows to be sure there were no eavesdroppers outside. Being assured they were not watched the boy went on and told of the time the men had been in the boat-house and of his own trip to find a clue as to their identity. "I didn't discover a thing until I happened to notice a piece of oar sticking out over the rafter. It seemed a queer place for it so I climbed up and moved it. The rafter was hollow and under some sawdust I discovered a

long metal box. Just as I got it out, my brother Francis whistled a warning, so I dumped the stuff back, all but the box, and climbed down and hid in the canal. The others were on that little hill just beyond the swamps and they showed themselves, so the fellows in the boat didn't come back and I got away. It's a good thing they didn't because they would have seen my footprints."

"We didn't know what he was doing, but we thought we'd better get the men away. When they came to the wharf they put right out again as soon as they saw us," Maxine explained.

"That's great coöperation," Pell answered.

"Finally we got home and Maxine and I opened the box. It was full of jewels. We thought it best not to have the little ones know they were in the house, so I put the stuff in this coil. Then we hid the empty box in a hollow tree near Fireplace Point. We could not decide right away what we'd better do. That chap in Orient watched me so closely that I thought he might find out if I got to asking about a constable and we don't want to write Dad. Mother might get the letter and be anxious about us."

Maxwell took a pair of pliers and quickly opened one end of the coil. Spreading his handkerchief over Pell's knees, he poured out some of its contents. Pell turned the flash on them and immediately turned it off again.

"Whew, what a lucky find," he whispered. "Why, we've been hunting over a year for trace of some of those jewels. There's a big reward out for them and you youngsters are in luck."

"We weren't thinking about a reward but we would like to have them returned to their rightful owners," Maxine said.

"You've been hunting for them and traced them here, so the reward doesn't really belong to us," Maxwell said.

"We'll see about that later. Now, what do you want to do with them?" Pell asked.

"We would like you to take charge of them and give us a receipt," Maxine answered.

"I'll do that. I'll give you a receipt now for the contents of the coil and as soon as I get them itemized I'll give you a complete list of what's here. Now, I wonder if you'll let me advise you?"

"Sure," the Maxes answered as one.

"First, I'm going to ask you to let me stay here the rest of the night. I can sleep on this couch and I'll slip out early in the morning, before sunup and get these things to a safe place. I believe my being here will be good for you children. We don't know if they have discovered the loss of this stuff but if they suspect you, they'll be here in a drove. I have a revolver and will help you keep them off. Then, another thing, to-morrow if it's nice, you all go out in

your sailboat away from the house. I want to give them a chance to search it. Some of my men will be here to watch them and get any evidence they can. You go off early and stay until noon at least. If you see a simple looking chap hanging around he's one of my men. You won't have difficulty recognizing him. He wears his hair hanging around his eyes and keeps his mouth open. He'll pose as a religionist, and if I think it's best for him to stay here, he'll tell you the Lord has called him to this Island. Treat him as if you think him some sort of beggar, give him something to eat at the back door, and don't say anything sensible to him unless he gives you a message from me. He's one of our best men and will look after you," Pell explained.

"That's agreeable to us," Maxwell answered.

"I'm telling you as much as I can of what I'm going to do, so you will play up to me. The recovery of this stuff is simply immense, but I want to catch the gang—all of them, especially the ringleaders, and I think if you understand you won't be frightened and perhaps do something that might queer things. As long as there is any danger I'll have you well protected here so you need not be afraid any more. Just go on, take things as they come, exactly as if this hadn't happened."

"Thank you ever so much," Maxine said.

"There are two steamer rugs here you can use for covers."

"That will be fine. You trot back to bed. Better take the dog upstairs, because he barked from there before and what I do not hear, he will. If I ever meet your father and mother I shall be glad to congratulate them on their Half Dozen. They must be pretty fine themselves," Pell smiled.

"They are the best ever," the Maxes assured him.

"I do not doubt it," Pell told them.

They bade Pell good-night and taking Bargulus went back upstairs. The children had all gone to sleep and the Maxes felt as if they had taken a heavy burden off their shoulders when they handed the jewels over to the detective. Also, it was a big relief to know that someone would be near in case they needed help. Now they could write to their father and mother that they were well looked after, although of course they would not tell yet of their adventures, nor Jane's non-appearance. They hopped into bed with lighter hearts than they had for days and in a few minutes they were making up for lost sleep with the dog curled outside the door as additional guard.

The next morning there was no sign of their guest. He had carefully folded up the steamer rugs, smoothed the couch, and slipped quietly

away taking the precious coil and its dangerous responsibility with him. When he got a chance Maxwell re-attached the empty wave trap, so it would not be missed by his brothers and sisters. It was a beautiful morning and Maxine said, as they finished their breakfast:

"I feel just like taking a sail. Will you give us a ride, Maxwell?"

"Sure will," Maxwell answered promptly.

"Great," exclaimed Francis. "Let's hurry up with the work."

"What happened to Mr. Pell?" Robert demanded.

"We told him about the jewels and what we heard those men saying. He was glad to know it and will take care of the stuff so we need not worry about it any more," Maxine answered.

"That's good," Francis agreed heartily

"How about taking a lunch with us and eating it on the boat?" Maxwell suggested as they hustled with the work.

"We can't do that because we invited Lawrence and Herbert over," Nancy reminded them.

The Maxes exchanged glances. "That's so, we did. Oh, well, we can be back in time to meet them," Maxwell answered. He and his sister had completely forgotten the two boys and wished there was some way their visit might be postponed.

"They will not come until noon. We can sail

until then and if we don't have a very fancy lunch they can come again. They won't mind," Nancy was sure.

"We can do better than that. We can sail past their camp and tell them. Perhaps they will take their boat out and sail with us and come when we do," Maxine suggested

"That's the best idea yet," Maxwell told her.

Without delay the Half Dozen, with Bargulus and Osric, were stowed in the *Jr. Black Eagle* which slipped quietly away from the dock, as if determined to give them a happy morning and keep them out of harm's way. Bargulus took his seat beside Francis, and Osric, who did not seem at all anxious to go sailing, sniffed around, occasionally meowing a protest.

"Be a good boy. It's lots of fun," Nancy coaxed, petting the restless cat. At last he prepared to make the best of things, and after further examination of their quarters he made himself at home, stretched very flat near the mast. The children saw him dig his claws into the wood and cling tight whenever the boat tipped a bit and after a while he seemed to enjoy himself as much as the rest did and didn't even mind when a wave splashed and sent a shower of spray over him.

"Good boy," Nancy called encouragingly.

"Meow," Osric answered and the youngsters laughed heartily.

They sailed first toward the Sound, then keeping well from the shore, came back, past the wharf, past the cliffs, and around to Fireplace Point. A little further along they could see Lawrence Nelson's brown tent among the trees, but Herbert's boat was nowhere in sight.

"Wonder if they are out too?" Francis remarked.

"Looks like it. Guess I will go in close and see," Maxwell answered.

They sailed as close as they could, but there was no sign of the two campers

"Suppose I swim over and tell them?" Nancy suggested.

"All right," the Maxes agreed, so Nancy dived off into the water and after a few minutes she stepped out onto the little beach. The others watched her until the trees hid her from view.

"Whoo-oo," called Nancy as she approached the tent but no one answered and when she was near enough she saw that the flaps were tied together, the camp was in good order and the boys had doubtless gone for a sail. "Whoo-oo," she called again but received no reply, so went back to the beach. "Not at home," she called.

"All right, come on back," Maxwell answered. Nancy waded out into the deep water, and climbed aboard.

" The water's fine here, let's bathe a while," she coaxed.

They all, except Carrol, immediately dived off and played around the water, having a gay time. They took Bargulus in, but he didn't care for it, so they put him back and he shook himself all over Carrol.

" You brought me a shower aboard," she laughed and helped him get dry by rubbing him with a towel. Bargulus liked that and stretched himself out contentedly. What Carrol couldn't do, the sun finished, and in no time the dog was quite dry and his coat smooth and soft after the bath.

" Guess the boys won't be back for a while. Shall we sail some more? We may meet them," Nancy said.

" We have been in the water long enough anyway," Maxine added, so they climbed over the side, wiped their feet, slipped into sweaters and again set sail, going well out into the harbor. They did not catch a glimpse of Herbert's boat, whose name was *Tickletoes,* and they went lazily out toward the Sound, sailed along the bar, and slowly back again.

" If we expect to have guests for dinner we'd better go back now, it's nearly twelve," Maxine said glancing at her watch.

" Yes, and I'm nearly starved," Robert remarked tenderly patting his tummie.

"Me too," declared Francis pulling in his belt to prove how empty he was.

"Don't do that, you will cut yourself in two," Nancy cried sharply

"Well, I'm so empty I'm liable to fall apart," Francis assured her.

When they reached the wharf there was no sign of their guests, nor were the boys at the house, so the children hurried in to prepare lunch, quite glad that Herbert and Lawrence were not too punctual. Maxwell looked around, but he couldn't tell if the place had been searched, although Maxine was sure things were not exactly as she had left them. They didn't have time to examine the rooms carefully, but lighted the oil stove, put on kettles and began setting the table. Suddenly Robert spied a queer looking man in overalls, shirt, and much worn shoes sitting on the steps.

"Maxes," he called, running to the kitchen. "There's a man sitting on the porch. He's got a long stick that he's leaning on and he looks awful tired."

Maxwell followed his small brother and sure enough there was a dirty bedraggled looking stranger leaning heavily on his stick. His lower jaw was dropped, his eyes rolled weirdly and his hair, which hung over his forehead, looked as if he had not combed it since he was a boy.

"What do you want?" Maxwell asked immediately recognizing the man Pell had described.

"The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away," the man answered.

"What is your name?" Nancy demanded.

"My name is Peter now and on this rock I shall build my church," the man answered.

"Come around to the back door and we will give you something to eat, Peter," Maxine told him, remembering Pell's instructions.

"Couldn't we give him something to eat there, he's so feeble," Carrol coaxed pityingly.

"He'll be better in the back where it's shadier," Maxwell answered.

It took Peter some time to get to the back door, but at last he did, and Carrol and Robert brought him out some sandwiches that Maxine had fixed hurriedly. Peter ate ravenously, as if he hadn't touched food in days, stuffing it into his mouth with both hands.

"Poor fellow. Want more?" Robert asked.

"No, little raven, the Lord has provided abundance," Peter mumbled and seemed content to curl up like a dog in the sunshine.

Lunch was ready but still there was no sign of Lawrence and Herbert.

"Suppose I take a run over and remind them," Maxwell suggested, but just then Lawrence and Herbert came running from the barn.

"We thought you had forgotten," Maxine greeted them.

"Lunch is waiting," Nancy added.

"We're glad you are here," Carrol told them.

"Well, Hector's pup, so are we," Lawrence laughed.

"You should have been with us, we had some wild time and nearly didn't get here at all," Herbert told them.

"Come on in and tell us what happened."

Seated around the table, Lawrence began his tale.

"We decided we would take an early morning sail. The water is always lovely when the sun is coming up, so we sailed around toward the Sound."

"Past here?" Nancy asked.

"No, we went the other way. The sun came up and was gorgeous, and we sailed about in it for a while, then we went ashore to cook breakfast. We had bread and eggs and bacon with us. We noticed another boat, a pretty big one, coming in and a motor-boat came around from this direction while we were eating. We left *Tickletoes* in a cove where she was well out of sight, and when we finished breakfast I caught sight of the old boat-house and we thought we'd walk over and pay her a visit."

"We've been visiting her ever since," Herbert interrupted.

"We couldn't get away," Lawrence laughed. Then he went on, "We were going through the tall grass when we happened to stumble into an open spot. It isn't anything my folks have put there, but there was a wide concrete thing showing only a few inches above the ground, and it has a heavy wooden cover. The thing was covered with sea moss and weeds, and if you did not know it hadn't always been there, you might go by without noticing it much."

"I didn't think anything of it until Larry called my attention to it. It isn't as conspicuous to see as to hear about," Herbert said.

"Well, we were wondering about it, when all of a sudden we heard voices, and we just had time and sense enough to duck under cover of the weeds when some men came up. There were five of them in all, but only two came at first. They pried the cover up, or a part of it, and then the men brought up a lot of boxes, and kegs. It seemed as if they must have put in a hundred or more, but we couldn't count, and when you have to keep quiet it seems a long time."

"Yes, and the grass tickled and made us squirm, and a bug walked over my nose. I thought sure we were goners because I had to sneeze the thing out. But, gee, we were lucky. Just as I sneezed, one of them coughed and the

others began to swear at him for making such a racket."

"You can't imagine how quiet they were. It was almost like watching a movie. They had rubber shoes on and had put boards over the wettest places of the bog and they certainly did work quietly and speedily. At last they put the cover back, threw the moss and some sand over it again and went to the boat-house. We had a chance to stretch but I wanted to get a better look at them so we wriggled up behind the house where the ditch runs under."

"I know," Maxwell said. "We were over there a few days ago. What was that ditch for?"

"Dad had it dug up from the beach so we could run the boats out easier. Sometimes it got too full, so he had it extended and let the water off into the bog. It's quite deep."

"You boys are not eating much lunch," Maxine reminded them.

"Well, don't worry about us. We're as empty as tanks," Herbert answered, helping himself. "I've been doing better than you have, Larry, so you eat and I'll tell them some of it."

"All right, go ahead; you ought to feel more able to talk after what you've put away," Larry grinned, as Maxine filled up his plate.

"We sneaked up through the canal, or ditch, and got under the house where we could hear,

but we didn't dare poke our noses out. Another chap joined them, and said, 'The Ingram kids are out on the bay and Sam's going through the place. We'll pick him up as we go back.'

"'Anyone on the water?' they asked him.

"'No,' he told them. 'Well, keep an eye out,' one said.

"For a minute everything was quiet. It sounded as if they were climbing the walls, then, all of a sudden, one swore the biggest string of oaths. 'What's up?' they asked him. 'What's eating you?' 'The hole's empty. Who was in here last?' They were all still a minute then one said, 'You were here, Joe; now what's happened to that box?' Gee, they were mad and they all talked so fast we couldn't catch every word, but we could make out they had a box of something hidden in the boat-house, and they were accusing each other of stealing it. They began to fight, until finally they were making so much racket, one of them called out, 'Keep still; do you want the whole country down on us?' They were quieter after that and the fellows they accused got a chance to deny knowing anything about the box. They said Sam had sent them for something out of it and they left it safe. They didn't believe him and finally he said, 'I bet those kids have been nosing about here and took it.' They just laughed at that and told him he was 'passing the buck.' Just then the fellow

who was watching outside said someone was coming and to make themselves scarce. They got out of the house quick and went away. They ran up the beach, and in a minute we couldn't hear a thing, but pretty soon a fellow came along in a motor-boat. We heard the motor stop, but we didn't hear the fellow get out, and soon we crawled from under and saw a chap sitting in a boat making sketches."

"We'd had all we wanted, so we made tracks for here," Larry ended.

Maxine, who was facing the windows, noticed that Peter had dragged himself around the house and was listening to the boy's recital. When the story came to a close, he disappeared.

"We saw some men going into that boat-house when we first came down," Francis volunteered.

"What do you suppose they have in that concrete thing?" Nancy wanted to know.

"Why, they are bootleggers and they must have thought this a good place to hide their stuff until they could get rid of it. I wish Dad was in New York, I'd call him up and tell him. He'd get a bunch of revenue men down here quick," Larry answered.

"Ready for dessert?" Maxine asked.

"All ready," Herbert answered. "Always ready."

"What are you going to do?" Nancy asked Lawrence.

" I don't know, except that I'm going to watch and get a good look at those fellows so I could point them out. There's a constable in Orient but he's an old chap and men like that wouldn't do a thing to him if he tried to butt in, unless he had a good sized posse to back him up."

For a few minutes the children ate in silence, which was finally broken by Herbert. " Wonder what was in that box they were fighting over. I suppose you are the ' kids ' the man said must have taken it."

" Yes, I suppose we are because they saw us over there one day," Maxwell admitted.

" Whatever it is, it must be valuable, judging by the way they fought and swore about it," Larry replied. " I thought they'd tear the place down the way they went at each other."

" Say, you aren't very safe here if they think you took it," Herbert declared suddenly.

" That's so," Larry added.

" Oh, we'll be all right," Maxwell answered. " They might search the house sometime but I don't believe they will bother us much."

" I'll tell you what. As long as we are here, we'll keep an eye on you. Let's make it a point to see each other every day."

" That's a good plan," Maxine said, then added, " I'd keep out of their way if I were you. If they know you have been here all the time they may think you took their box."

"That's so," Herbert agreed. "I'm for giving them a wide berth, myself."

"Have more dessert," Carrol invited.

"I would but I have no place to put it," Larry sighed. "You are great cooks and this is the best meal we've had since we left home."

"Glad you enjoyed it. We went past the camp this morning to tell you we were sailing, but we didn't find you at home."

"I went ashore, but your tent was all closed up and we decided you were sailing too. Then we watched for *Tickletoes,* but didn't see her."

"*Tickletoes* is still tickling her toes in that cove. I hope those men did not discover her after they left the house. But her sail was down and I suspect they were in too much of a hurry to be very observing," Herbert answered.

"Let's hope so," Lawrence added.

The meal finished, the two boys helped clear away the things. They were all greatly excited about their various experiences and could talk of nothing else.

"If my father were home we could tell him, but he's out of the city until the end of July, and if we said anything to Mother, it would be all off with our camping. I don't believe those chaps will bother us as long as we mind our own business, and when we go back to Orient we can give their show away good and proper," Herbert argued.

" I don't want to interfere with their business, but I do want to see who they are and what they look like. Just telling where the stuff is hidden won't help any because they'll go off and find another bunk, somewhere," Lawrence insisted.

" Did the fellow who was sketching see them, do you suppose? " Maxine asked.

" I don't know. He was just drawing pictures. Had an easel set up in his boat. I don't believe he would have noticed if the sea had run moonshine," Larry laughed.

"Artists never notice anything except birds, and sky and color," Herbert added.

" Our father does. He notices everything," Robert promptly defended.

CHAPTER VIII

THE COLONIAL PARTY

"HERB and I want to go up to the attic and get some flags for the boat," Lawrence explained.

"All right, I guess you know the way," Maxine laughed.

"We surely do," Herbert answered and the two boys went off, two steps at a time, leaving the Half Dozen busy writing a letter to Mother and Dad and one to Aunt Phœbe.

They thanked the good lady very properly for the twenty-five dollars and assured her they were well cared for and were having a fine time at Black Eagle Island. They sighed with relief when the task was done, for Aunt Phœbe was very particular and took note of every misplaced comma or smudge that got into their letters to her. Writing to Dad and Mother was a pleasure and much more easily accomplished. They told of finding Lawrence's camp, about the bombardment, the old *Black Eagle* and the Civil War veteran, with his treasured bullets, together with numberless details of what they ate and did; the cosy fireplace and the newly installed radio. When they were finished, the letters were read

aloud and carefully considered, Aunt Phœbe's money order enclosed, endorsed to Dad, and the list of their votes attached. They just finished sealing the envelope when they heard their guests coming downstairs, but they seemed to be coming very slowly. With every step there was a sharp click-ity-click of something bumping behind them.

"Behold, David Nelson, the Lord of the Manor," Lawrence called as he stepped into the room. The Half Dozen stared at him in amazement.

"How nice," Maxine cried.

"You look just like a picture," Carrol declared clapping her hands.

The two boys were arrayed in Colonial costumes of 1675. They wore wide-brimmed hats with feathers, very fancy satin waistcoats buttoned to their chins, brocaded coats with lace at the sleeves, knee-breeches, and soft high boots that flapped about their knees. Around their waists were buckled ancient swords that dragged noisily after them as they walked. To be sure the clothes were all much too large and although the boys cut picturesque figures and tried to look dignified, they had to grin broadly at the surprise their sudden appearance created.

"We are most happy, sirs, to welcome you to Nelson Manor," Lawrence said, bowing low with his hand on his chest and hat in hand. The feat

was accomplished with considerable difficulty because his sword got in the way of his feet and nearly tripped him.

"We are happy to accept your kind hospitality," Maxine answered making a low curtsy which the five mimicked gravely although they wanted to laugh.

"May we have the honor of your company at a Colonial party?" Lawrence invited. "We would esteem it a valued favor."

"In other words, let's all dress up," Herbert added by way of enlightenment. "There are lots of clothes in the attic."

"What fun," the Half Dozen agreed.

Soon they were all on the top floor where Lawrence, as Lord of the Manor, hospitably opened an iron-bound, sea-stained chest.

"The property of my esteemed ancestor. It went through a shipwreck with him off the coast of India. Array yourselves as befits the occasion, I pray you," he said.

"I don't think we ought to," Maxine said.

"Sure your Dad won't mind?" Nancy hesitated.

"Not a bit. We often play with these things and we'll be careful of them. It doesn't hurt them to be taken out sometimes." He drew forth a wonderful collection of brilliant coats, hats, dresses and caps. "This is the wedding dress of the first Lady Nelson. They were mar-

ried in Holland," he added producing a heavy, colorful gown with a high head-dress. "It ought to just fit you, Maxine."

"I'd be afraid to put it on," she declared.

"I don't believe you can hurt it. It's as strong as a board," Lawrence assured her.

Maxine touched the beautiful garment and had to admit it was certainly substantial. Larry unfolded the huge thing and it stood unsupported, like a great tent, as if its wearer had shrunk out of it.

"It's perfectly darling," Maxine admitted admiringly.

"Oh, please try it on," Carrol coaxed gently, patting its smooth surface.

"All right," the twin agreed and took the dress to her own room.

For the next half hour the seven youngsters had a gay time fitting themselves into wonderful old costumes of various periods. The wedding dress was not so difficult to get into, because the bodice laced in front, but most of the other frocks were so small around the waist that even Carrol, who found one that might have belonged to a young lady about her own age, had to hold her breath while it was being fastened about her slender little body. All the skirts were long, even the children's, and when they were finally dressed they looked exactly as if they had stepped out of an old painting and were ready

for a fancy ball. They had wigs with tiny ribbons in the back, immense fans, mitts and huge head-dresses.

"Did anyone ever walk in these things?" Nancy demanded. "I feel like a circus." She stood in the midst of a grey hooped skirt heavily cascaded with wide ruffles that were caught with ribbons and lace. Her small tanned shoulders and arms peeked through the sleeveless basque and she did look as if she belonged in a museum.

"No matter what you feel like, you look great," Lawrence declared admiringly. "May I have the pleasure of a dance, Miss Ingram?"

"Why, they walked and they rode horseback on side saddles and went hunting and took long journeys in carriages," Herbert told her.

"Well, not in dresses exactly like that," Maxine laughed.

"No, when they went places, they wore more," Lawrence announced.

"Good gracious. I don't see how they moved," Nancy insisted.

"Well, they did a lot of going around. They baked and did spinning and all sorts of things. The men's clothes were as stiff and heavy as the women's. Come on downstairs, I'll show you some of the books that tell about what some of them did," Larry suggested.

There was no racing downstairs in the trailing things. The girls minced along daintily in

high-heeled slippers elaborate with beads and buckles, while the gentlemen of the party struggled with swords and the long tails of their handsome coats. It was a most picturesque group that finally arrived in the living-room, where, amid the old-fashioned furnishings and hangings, the clothes did not seem so out of place or extraordinary.

"I think they are lovely," Carrol sighed happily.

"Wish Mother and Dad could see," Francis declared.

"Tell you what. I have a camera in the library. You all go out on the porch and I'll take your pictures. There are some films in it that I didn't use when I was down here at Easter time," Lawrence announced.

The party gathered around on the porch and Larry brought his kodak. When he was ready, he arranged them after the style of old-time grouping. Maxine sat in state in the biggest chair with Maxwell standing very stiff beside her. Carrol sat on a low stool at her feet while the others took very formal attitudes around the three and Larry made the snapshot. Then Maxwell took a picture with Lawrence in his place and after that the rest of the film was used up in showing the costumes of each member of the party. They had a lot of fun posing and teasing each other, for it was easier to laugh than

to be as dignified as their grand clothes demanded.

"There, guess that will show your folks how elegant we look," Lawrence declared as he wound up the film. "I'll have these developed and give you some copies for the family album. Now come on inside and I'll show you those books. The Nelsons have always been great for keeping family records."

Into the library they trooped and Larry opened a drawer and produced an ancient scrap book. "Look at this," he said pointing to a newspaper clipping. The children gathered around and read:

"On the 20th day of Ougost, 1667, David Nelson gathered a grand assembly at his house, of which the writer was one. The guests came from the far west Philadelphia, from SayBrook, and from New York and did besport themselves riding and hunting. A feast was prepared in the honour of Lady Nelson, whose birthday it was."

"See how they spelled August," Francis said.

Lawrence pointed out another article with pride and the youngsters were interested in the item, which read:

"We learn that on Sept. 28, 1728, a piratical vessel of six guns and eighty men anchored at Nelson Point and the ensuing night attacked the house of Lawrence Nelson, wounded him, took

possession of his plate and other valuable property, and destroyed what they could not remove. Attempts were made to capture the pirates which proved unavailing."

"Jinks! They had some exciting times here," Maxwell remarked.

"They surely did. Captain Kidd landed here one night and made my folks give him and his men a dinner. He had been chased ashore and buried some of his treasure in a natural cave around near Fireplace Point. That was just before he was captured and before they shipped him off, some officers came here, dug it up and sent it after him to England. Dad has a copy of the list of things Kidd had hidden, together with the Connecticut Governor's signature on the receipt he gave Lawrence Nelson. I can't show you that book because Mother took it abroad with them. They want to compare some things in it with the English records, if they find any. Kidd was really here though and he gave Lady Nelson a ring because she prepared him a good meal. Mother has that too, and a piece of gold cloth. I suppose he stole them but they were never claimed. There's a stone marks the place where the stuff was buried. You'll run across it some time when you walk around the Island. It's just a natural granite boulder with an inscription that Lawrence Nelson's son carved on the face."

"Captain Oakley said this used to be a part of the mainland," Maxwell said.

"Yes, it did, but a lot of it was washed away during storms in the first four generations," Lawrence answered.

"Well, I'm suffocating in these clothes. I'm going to take them off," Nancy announced positively, starting upstairs.

"Me too," Robert declared following close at her heels.

The things were so heavy that the children's faces were red and hot from wearing them, and soon they stripped themselves of their finery and were mighty glad to get back into their own simple garments.

"Gosh, this is lots better," Herbert sighed, arrayed again in thin knickers and soft shirt. "Don't see how those fellows lived in so many clothes."

"Well, they had to dress warmly because they didn't have their homes as well heated as we do," Maxwell informed them.

"Did you people find the curio closet?" Lawrence asked.

"No," Maxine admitted.

Lawrence went to a long panel at one side of the library, pressed lightly a small wooden button that had escaped the notice of the Half Dozen and the door slid back, revealing a narrow, deep room.

"This used to be a closet but Dad's grandfather had it fixed over for the curios. It's queer, but there has always been a collector in the Nelson family. Dad's great-grandfather thought it wicked to waste time looking for things or doing anything with them when you found them but his mother didn't mind his doing it and used to let him have this closet for his things. When he grew up, he had the shelves made and classified all the stuff. Sure you are not bored?"

"Of course not," Maxine insisted.

As he talked, Lawrence drew out some of the shelves and displayed a marvelous collection of arrow-heads, butterflies, wild birds' eggs, hundreds of different things all neatly labeled. In deeper drawers were knives from all over the country, firearms, cutlasses, swords, and odd treasures picked up by wandering Nelsons from different parts of the world. The things were well cared for by each generation as they came into possession of their heritage, and the children gazed at them in wonder and delight.

"Do you collect things?" Nancy wanted to know.

"Yes. I like bugs and birds, and I like trees, too, but I can't collect them. In New York I have a lot of pictures of birds and when I'm bigger, I'll bring some of them here. Dad liked sea things. Here is some of his stuff." Lawrence pulled out a drawer of shells of all shapes

and colors, some polished until they were iridescent, others natural, and all of them lovely to see. "I like the sea things too," Lawrence said.

The children spent so much time examining the treasures that it wasn't until the clock struck six that they realized how the afternoon had flown.

"Stay to supper," Maxine invited.

"We were going to cook corn on the beach," Herbert explained.

"I'll tell you what. We'll go and get *Tickletoes* and fetch our corn to the wharf here and have our bat," Lawrence suggested.

"That would be fine," the Half Dozen agreed heartily.

"Hope those chaps from the boat-house didn't discover *Tickletoes,*" Herbert remarked.

"Suppose I walk over with you and see if she's all right?" Maxwell suggested.

"Great idea! What's the matter with you all coming?" Lawrence invited. "We can sail around for the corn and back again."

"Will she hold us all?" Robert cried, delighted at the idea.

"Sure," Herbert assured him.

"Couldn't we go in the *Jr. Black Eagle?*" Maxine asked.

"Of course, that's the very thing to do," Lawrence agreed.

Wild with enthusiasm the children ran down

to the *Jr. Black Eagle* and piled aboard. "You sail," Maxwell said to Lawrence.

"All right. It will seem good to." Lawrence took his place and soon the boat was skimming happily through the water as if it were as delighted as its merry passengers. Bargulus was there. He didn't wait for an invitation but took it as a matter of course that they would not go without him, which was very true.

"Good old dog," Herbert said, petting him approvingly.

"You bet he's a good dog. You should have seen him keep the fellow off the wharf when we told him to," Francis said proudly.

They sailed around the Island toward the Sound and suddenly Lawrence had an idea. "Let's keep still and see if we surprise anyone at the boat-house," he said. Considering the noise they had been making it was amazing how quiet they instantly became. Lawrence sailed well out into the Sound as if he intended to pass the Island, then turned suddenly and came almost straight in toward land opposite the old boat-house.

"There is someone there. I see two men," Herbert said softly.

The *Jr. Black Eagle* went steadily along and as they neared the beach they caught a glimpse of a motor-boat partially concealed in the tall grass. Either their maneuver was so unex-

pected, or the men were too occupied with their own affairs to notice the approach of the children. They faced the water in surprise when Lawrence sang out sharply:

"You fellows know that you are trespassing?"

At first the men paid no attention to what he said. The tide was high and Lawrence was able to bring his boat close to land and they were just in time to see a third man coming out of the boat-house. Lawrence shouted again.

"What are you doing in that boat-house?"

"It's only those kids," the children heard one of the men say indifferently and Larry's eyes were full of anger.

"You chaps will have to get off here," he insisted. "Hurry up. I'm going to see that you go."

"Well, and who may you be, my fine fellow?" one of the men laughed.

"I'm Lawrence Nelson and if you don't leave this Island immediately I'll notify the police and have you put off."

"Don't be a goof. Lawrence Nelson is in Europe," the man answered impudently turning up his nose at the owner of Black Eagle Island.

"Well, I'm not in Europe. I'm right here, and I'm ordering you off our property. You have no business coming here without permission and you know it perfectly well."

The men conferred a moment and looked the boy over. Finally one said pleasantly, "No offense, Master Nelson. We only put in here to rest and have a swim. We will be gone in a few minutes."

"You did not need to rest or swim in our boat-house," Larry flung back at them.

"Sorry if you object. We did not know it was yours."

"You knew it wasn't yours," Larry answered quickly. "You'll have to leave now, or I'll get someone here that will make you."

It was plain the men did not want to leave but they must have resolved it would be better to humor the boy. Reluctantly they pulled out their boat and started her engine, with her nose turned directly toward the *Jr. Black Eagle.*

"Look out, Larry, they're going to be nasty," Herbert warned sharply.

Swiftly Lawrence swung his boat about in the breeze and not an instant too soon, for the motor-boat was a high-powered affair and the man at the wheel drove her straight toward the small boat. One of the men quickly sprang forward and with an oath shoved the other chap aside, jammed the wheel hard around and they passed the *Jr. Black Eagle's* bow with the barest fraction of safety, leaving deep billows rolling behind them that made the little boat roll precariously. Lawrence kept her well in hand and

fortunately a disaster was averted. When they saw the motor coming the children uttered no cry but jumped to their feet ready to dive off if necessary. Maxwell was beside Carrol with his hand under her arm to help her. It was an intensely thrilling, breathless half minute and when it was over Larry sputtered angrily.

"Wonder what that fool thought to gain by swamping us!"

They scowled after the fast disappearing motor-boat. "Anyway," Herbert remarked, "you had a good look at them."

"I saw one of those men in the post-office the first day I went over," Maxwell declared. "It was the chap who took the wheel away from the other fellow. He seemed to have more sense than the rest."

"The man who had the wheel first was the one who came and asked us for water, and Bargulus wouldn't let him land," Francis added.

"The other one was a mean cuss with shifty eyes. I saw them as he passed us. They are so close together he hardly has any bridge to his nose," Herbert volunteered. "It's too bad you spoke to them, Larry, because they may try to get back at us, and we'll get more than we bargained for."

"I didn't think of that until it was too late, but it made me sore seeing them take possession of the place as if they owned it. The only thing

I thought of was that Dad might be blamed because they are here with their bootlegging and get us into trouble with the government. Well, we'd better be getting along," Larry added, starting toward the point where *Tickletoes* was concealed.

They found the boat safe and Herbert went aboard, set the sail and was soon ready to put off.

"Don't I get any passengers?" he demanded.

"May I go with him, Maxes?" Francis asked.

"I'd like to, too," Nancy announced.

"All right," Maxine answered, so the two quickly transferred themselves to the other boat. For a moment Bargulus wanted to join them, but Robert persuaded him to stay where he was so the dog settled himself contentedly, but he kept his eye on *Tickletoes* as if he felt that he had two charges now instead of one, and must take care of both of them.

They sailed around the Island, not catching another glimpse of the motor-boat, and finally arrived opposite the camp. Lawrence and Maxwell went ashore for the corn and had a great time getting it aboard, but at last every ear was stowed, together with a strip of bacon, and off they sailed again toward home.

"Let's race," Herbert called.

"We're away," Larry shouted.

The boys bent to the task grimly and the boats with full sails sped swiftly through the water, sending a great spray of foam over the passengers who shouted encouragingly to each other. Even Bargulus stood up and barked in his excitement. *Tickletoes* was a bit in the lead but the *Jr. Black Eagle* gained steadily and surely, and before they reached the wharf she was ahead.

"Hurrah for the *Jr. Black Eagle,*" Herbert shouted.

The seven children took up the cry lustily and cheered the little boat until she must have been embarrassed at their praise of her.

"All ashore who are going ashore," Larry called through his hands as if his passengers were scattered over huge decks. Everybody was going ashore, even the corn and bacon. Then began a sort of parade to the house for matches, kindling, bread, butter, milk, salt and anything else the youngsters thought they might like.

Maxwell built a log fire well out of reach of the tide. Herbert cut a dozen sticks and sharpened them, Nancy husked the corn, Maxine cut the bacon and spread out paper plates and napkins for the party, while Robert, Lawrence and Carrol gathered driftwood to keep the fire going. In short order everything was ready and they took their places near enough to poke their corn and bacon over the blaze. It cooked quickly and

sent out the most appetizing fragrance, although the children did not really need anything to tempt them to eat. Maxwell roasted Carrol's corn, and Larry toasted a fine strip of meat for her, which he presented with a bow.

"Permit me to serve you, Madam," he said solemnly and Carrol accepted with a delighted smile.

"Thank you. Do you want your stick back?"

"No, I have another one for my private use," Larry assured her.

Everything tasted exactly right, even when it was scorched, and the children ate heartily despite an occasional burned finger. They laughed at each other and enjoyed themselves hugely. In the midst of the meal, Herbert suddenly asked:

"I say, who is that man?" He nodded toward the path.

Maxwell looked up and saw Peter shambling toward them. "Oh, he's a poor chap who has 'got religion.' He's been on the Island for quite a while and says the Lord sent him."

"How'd he get here?" Lawrence asked.

"I don't know, but he's perfectly harmless. We feed him sometimes and he calls us ravens," Maxine explained.

"A lot of the folks on the mainland get those religious attacks, Larry. Mother says they are alone so much, especially those who go to sea

fishing, that they get sort of turned in the head. They go around praying for everything and everybody and really believe they have a mission. Be careful, don't offend him. They are a sorry lot and can't help being crazy. Mother says we should be patient with them. Sometimes they get well again," Herbert explained.

Maxwell was glad of this because he did not want Lawrence inquiring too closely about why Peter was on the Island and perhaps try to drive him off, but Larry's eyes were full of pity as they looked at the poor chap.

" Come on, Peter, and have something to eat," he called kindly.

Peter came obediently and sat down a little distance away from them. Larry handed him his own ear of corn. " Be careful of your fingers, it's still hot."

" The Lord joined His disciples by the seashore," Peter murmured absently, accepting the corn and the plate Maxine offered him. He did not eat so ravenously as he did the first time the Half Dozen fed him, and he kept watching the water as if expecting a vision to appear from the waves.

It was a beautiful evening for sailing and there were several boats taking advantage of the delightful weather. Suddenly Peter stood up and yawned prodigiously, stretching his arms as high as he could reach them, then bringing his hands

down slowly to his sides. This done he jumped half a dozen times straight into the air.

"Looks as if he's doing his daily dozen," Herbert whispered.

"If he wasn't so thin, I'd think he is trying to reduce his weight," Lawrence replied.

At that Peter gave a long, low howl that must have been heard way out in the harbor. Bargulus got up and looked at the man as if trying to make him out. Then Peter howled again and began to brandish his arms and kick his legs furiously.

"What's the matter, Peter?" Francis called.

"We must render to the Lord the praise that is due Him," Peter answered breathlessly and the children had to turn away to keep from smiling.

Maxwell had watched the man's antics curiously and when he turned his eyes to the water he noticed a sailboat with one solitary figure standing upright in her bow. The distance was too great for him to make out who it was, but he had a feeling that it might be Philip Pell. He looked back at Peter again and it seemed to him there was a method or some kind of system to the religionist's movements. His arms would go up several times, then he would jump. After that he began to whirl himself about and run in circles, then with another howl he dropped to the sand and began throwing it over his head. Soon he

lay quiet, panting from his exertions, and finally he sat up again staring vacantly about him. In a minute he spied his half finished food and promptly fell upon it, eating every crumb.

"Want more?" Maxine asked softly.

"The ravens have given me in abundance," he told her quietly, then picking up his staff he started laboriously toward the boat-house.

"He ought to have someone to look after him; he might hurt himself even if he doesn't hurt anyone else," Lawrence declared as Peter disappeared among the tall trees.

"Oh, let him alone," Herbert begged. "Say, I went out to Islip once where the insane people are kept. It's all right for those who are violent, but chaps like this don't have a show to get well. Everybody they see is buggy and they get worse instead of better. This place is quiet, he's let alone, and I don't believe he's all insane. His eyes don't look as if he is."

"He is better here than he would be in a town where people might excite him," Maxine added quietly.

"I wonder how he got here," Larry insisted.

"So do I," Maxwell conceded.

"So do we all, and if we asked him he'd probably tell us the ravens brought him," Herbert added.

Maxwell believed that Peter had been signaling and he was doubly convinced when he ob-

served the solitary sailor steer his boat past the Island and finally disappear behind the cliffs.

The sun had set majestically like a brilliant orange and drawn its golden path across the water, leaving the quiet surface reflecting the colors of the rainbow until it looked like an opal sea. All the world was stilled, and the children sat in awed silence at the loveliness spread before them. Slowly the colors faded. The delicate pinks of the sky grew deeper and deeper until they were soft grey, and that, too, became darker as night crept silently about them.

" Well, that is the end of a perfect day," Lawrence said as he drew a deep breath of appreciation.

" Yes, and what are you fellows doing to-morrow? " Herbert asked.

" Oh, I don't know. We hadn't planned anything special," Maxwell answered.

" What are you going to do? " Robert wanted to know.

" We have some fireworks and we expect to do some banging around," was Lawrence's answer.

The Half Dozen sat up quickly. " Fireworks! " Francis exclaimed

" Sure, it's Fourth of July. We brought over a whole slew of stuff and a big flag."

" By George, we forgot to get those flags," Larry laughed. " Let's get them now."

"Everybody take a load," Maxine reminded them, so the children gathered up the remains of the supper, assured themselves that the fire was well out, and then marched single file to the house.

"If you'll excuse me, I'll attend to Bess," Maxwell said.

"I'll go with you," Herbert declared.

Up in the attic Maxine and Nancy helped put the clothes away in the old chest, and when its lid was fastened, Lawrence opened a box of his own and produced an armful of flags, large and small. Some of them were joined together with long cords.

"Here are enough for both boats. They have to be dressed up for to-morrow," he exclaimed.

"Didn't Dad buy us some fireworks?" Nancy asked her sister.

"Yes, you remember? We brought down a box full."

"I thought we did, but I had almost forgotten all about them."

"We have been having such a good time I forgot that the Fourth has come so quickly," Maxine laughed.

With arms full of bunting, flags and decorations, the children went back downstairs just in time to meet Herbert and Maxwell coming in with the milk.

CHAPTER IX

FOURTH OF JULY

The Half Dozen accompanied their guests to the beach and watched them stow the decorations into *Tickletoes* and get her ready for the trip to camp. Even Osric was there to watch them off and that was quite a concession, for Osric was rather an exclusive cat. Dad said it was because they had given him such an important name and he felt he must uphold the dignity of a courier of Hamlet. Bargulus was a pirate in Shakespeare's "Henry VII," so Mother declared their dog was a bit of rogue as a result. The Half Dozen decided this was true and humored their pets' whims.

"You'll be over to-morrow?" Carrol invited.

"Yes, we'll be here. We'll bring some of our fireworks and set them off with yours, if you like," Larry responded heartily.

"That will make a fine showing," Maxwell declared.

The children had been so busy watching the two pals that they did not notice a sailboat until it was right at the wharf, and its occupant called out:

"Hello, Herbert. I've been looking for you

boys. Aunt Nell arrived from abroad, and Mother wants you to come home. Uncle Will is here too and he has to leave to-morrow."

"Oh, gee, Linc, can't we come in the morning?" Herbert pleaded.

"Orders are orders, old fellow. I brought Hamilton with me and he's dismantling your camp. Sorry to spoil your fun but you won't want to miss Aunt Nell. She'd be disappointed if you didn't come," Lincoln answered.

"Yes, of course! Well, all right. This is my brother Lincoln," Herbert introduced the Half Dozen.

"Your Aunt Nell isn't crazy about seeing me, Linc. Suppose I stay over," Larry said, not able to hide his own disappointment at the turn of affairs.

"I do not believe your mother and father would like that, and I know ours wouldn't. Come on, Larry, they would only send me back if I appeared without you," Lincoln told him.

"Well, I suppose that's so, but I'd be all right," Larry temporized.

"Of course you would, but if anything happened, my folks would never forgive themselves, and yours would not forgive them."

"All right," Larry sighed, then added to the Half Dozen, "I'll come over sometime, if I can."

"Perhaps you can both come back next week

because Aunt Nell is only staying a few days," Lincoln volunteered.

This bit of information cheered them all and in a few minutes good-byes were exchanged and the two boats went off in the moonlight leaving the Half Dozen with a decidedly lonely feeling tugging at their hearts.

" Come on. A little radio and a lot of bed," Maxine called cheerily, and back to the house they went, only they didn't run this time, and as Osric seemed inclined to linger, Nancy carried him in her arms, an attention he accepted graciously.

Later, when the younger children were tucked in bed, the Maxes sat thoughtfully in the library. The radio was on and they listened impatiently to an Independence Day program given at a banquet in one of New York's biggest hotels.

" I'm sorry that Larry spoke to those men as he did," Maxwell remarked.

" So am I," Maxine agreed. " Let's listen to something else." She was tuning in on another station when they heard a soft knock at one of the library windows and when Maxwell went to it, he discovered Philip Pell standing close to one of the posts. The boy opened the door.

" Come on in," he whispered.

" Brought you some letters from Orient," Pell said as he entered, and fishing the letters from one of his pockets he handed them over.

"Here's one from Dad," Maxine cried happily.

"Thanks a lot. It was awfully good of you to bring them," Maxwell told their friend.

"No trouble at all. Besides I wanted to know who those boys were that were with you to-day and what they said to the men in the boat-house."

The Maxes told him that Larry had ordered the men off and they also told him of the two boys' experience in the morning and their finding the concrete storage cave.

"I know about that. I was on the shore for a while, then went around in my boat because I wanted to get the fellows away. I took some snapshots of them as evidence."

"Can you arrest them now?" Maxwell wanted to know.

"Yes, I could, but these are all little fellows and we want to get the gang. The ringleaders are the important men and they are the ones I want," Pell explained.

"Larry saw Peter and thought he should be taken away to an asylum, or something," Maxine offered.

"I was wondering if I'd better tell Larry that Peter is all right," Maxwell said thoughtfully.

Pell shook his head. "Half a dozen is enough in a secret," he smiled. "Your friend did put a crimp into things to-day. Where did you say he's camping?"

"He was over by Fireplace Point, but Mrs. Seawell sent for them to-night. She has relatives who have just come from abroad, and wanted the boys to come home."

"That's good," Pell grinned. "Those fellows will probably discover the boys have gone. If any of them come around here, be sure to tell them."

"Larry may tell about his experience over in Orient," Maxine ventured.

"I've thought of that, but I'll have to take a chance."

"Larry and Herbert heard the men fighting over the box that's lost."

"I'm banking on Larry's keeping things secret for a while. He knows they'll never get back if Mrs. Seawell thinks there is any danger here," Pell answered.

"What do you think the men will do to find the box?" Maxine asked with a shade of anxiety in her voice.

"Just now they are suspicious of one another, and while they are in that temper you are safe as in a church, especially if you continue to act naturally," was Pell's answer. "Now I'm going out on a little expedition. Put a light in one of your windows if you need me. I hope your letters contain good news. Good-night."

The detective slipped out, leaving the Maxes happy that he was near. They opened their let-

ters and read gaily that Mother was still making marvelous progress, and that their first letter had been received and greatly enjoyed. There was a short message from Mother at the end and at last the two went quietly upstairs.

Before the sun was up the next morning, Francis was out of bed and was the first to discover the letter from Dad, which Maxwell had left on his dresser. Promptly forgetting that he had resolved to keep quiet until the rest waked, he let out a joyous whoop and went dancing in to Nancy, who sat up and rubbed her eyes at sight of him.

"Good-morning. What's all the shouting about?" she demanded.

"A letter from Mother." Francis waved the envelope as he danced around the room.

Nancy was out of bed in an instant and after him. "Let's read it."

By this time everybody else was wide awake, so climbing on to Maxine's bed she read the letter to them.

"Isn't it fine? How did you get the letter?" Francis inquired.

"Mr. Pell brought it last night. He was in Orient and saw the mail."

"Hurrah for Mr. Pell. Isn't he nice!" Robert sang.

"Whoever wants breakfast would better dress

quickly," Maxine reminded her brothers and sisters.

" I'm going to raise the flag before we begin to eat. Don't forget this is the Fourth of July," Maxwell shouted and taking the biggest flag Larry had left, he attached it to the ropes on the flagpole, then shouted, " Attention, everybody! "

Around the pole the Half Dozen gathered and stood at salute as the flag made its way slowly to the top. It was just in time to greet the sun and it unfurled itself gracefully as if saying " Good-morning " to the world. A white seagull rested for a second on the top of the pole, then spread its wings and continued on its way.

" Can't we fire off a big cracker, just one? " Robert coaxed.

"All right," Maxwell agreed and getting Dad's gift he opened it quickly. Almost the first thing they spied was a giant cracker.

" Isn't Dad a peach! " Francis cried as he beheld the wonder.

Maxwell took the big cracker, stood it up in the pebbly path, and with the rest at a safe distance, he lighted the fuse, then ran back. The thing sputtered a bit, then after crackling uncertainly for an instant, it gave a great bang, making noise enough to satisfy the soul of any good American boy.

" Hurrah for the Fourth," the youngsters screamed at the top of their lungs.

" Isn't it grand to make a noise without disturbing anyone? " Carrol giggled, for she had shouted as loud as the rest of them.

" Now to breakfast, and after such a beginning I expect you all to put away a regular meal," Maxine said, pretending to scowl, but Maxine wasn't very good at scowling and the children only laughed at her efforts. She was perfectly appeased by what they did to their food, and when it was finished, Maxwell arose saying:

" Cows to be milked, dishes to be done, beds to be made, bird baths to be filled, chickens to be fed. Everybody scamper."

Away they went, like a jolly little troop of soldiers, and not a single task was slighted.

" We are low on berries," Maxine remarked.

" I'll go for some," Nancy shouted grabbing a pail.

"And me and me," Francis and Robert chorused.

" Go to the nearest bushes and don't play too long. I'll dress up the *Jr. Black Eagle* or she will feel slighted," Maxwell announced.

" Carrol and I will help," Maxine answered, so the Half Dozen divided and one part went into the Island while the others made their way to the beach with their arms full of flags.

Francis, Robert and Nancy raced most of the way to the nearest clump of berry bushes, and began to pick industriously. They had two pails

to fill, and the ripe blueberries dropped swiftly into them, only occasionally one found its way directly to a small mouth where it disappeared, leaving a blue stain on red lips.

"Gee, but they are good," Robert smacked vigorously.

"Do you think you are a firecracker?" Nancy laughed.

"I'm a giant cracker," Francis declared and was just about to let out a gorgeous shout, when Nancy held up her finger.

"Hush, there's a man over there."

The children peeked through the bushes and saw a man moving about slowly, still some distance away from them. They watched him for several minutes. Sometimes he would be in plain sight and at others hidden by the trees. They were able to make out that he had a long stick with which he tapped the ground as he walked back and forth. Then he took out a pair of field-glasses and put them to his eyes, but he was studying the trees and did not appear interested in anything except his immediate neighborhood. The children went on picking, but kept very quiet and apparently the man, whoever he was, did not know they were near.

"What do you suppose he's doing?" Robert whispered.

"I think he's looking for that box. Perhaps

he thinks it's hidden on the Island and he's examining everything," Nancy whispered.

"That's what he's doing, all right. If I were hunting for it, I'd tap everything and look at the trees," Francis volunteered.

There were lots of berries low on the bushes, so the children crept cautiously beneath them and went on filling their pails. Occasionally one of them would peep cautiously out, and after a while they saw another man who was behaving the same as the first one. In due time the two met, and one called softly to the other. As the wind was coming toward them, Nancy heard him say:

"Any luck?"

"No. I don't expect to have. Those fellows never hid the stuff in here. They would be boobs if they did!"

"I don't believe they did, but how could they get it away?" the second man demanded fiercely.

"May have had someone from the outside. It's my idea they got away with it. Carl tried to leave Orient last night, but the fellows brought him back and treated him some rough too. He's all in this morning."

"They'll have to tell eventually," the second man insisted.

"I'm wondering if one of the others didn't go after it," the first man suggested, and the other stopped his search to look at his companion.

"That's not impossible," he said, adding, "Say, I'm sick of this and I'm not going to keep fooling around here. They may be getting away with the stuff and they are not going to get rid of me like that, you can bet," and he started briskly off.

The other called him back. "Wait a minute, let's think the thing over before we go off at half cock." The two drew together and talked so low that what they said was no longer distinguishable, and although the pails were full the children waited, not daring to go any closer, for in moving about they might break a branch or slip on a stone which would betray their presence.

After a long time, Francis whispered, "Think we could go back?" but Nancy shook her head. Although keeping quiet was a difficult task they managed to do it, and at last they saw the two men moving slowly off toward Fireplace Point. They continued to tap the ground as they went, and stopped occasionally to search the trees and bushes with their glasses. Finally they disappeared in the woods and the children crept out and took a good look about them to assure themselves no other searchers were in the neighborhood.

"Let's see what they are doing," Francis suggested.

"Just a little way," Nancy agreed.

Stepping cautiously the three followed the two

men and soon saw them again a short distance ahead. The first one was examining the trees, and suddenly Nancy realized they were near the hollow oak where the box had been hidden and she was sure that the man with the glasses had them trained on the very tree.

"You go back for the boat and I'll stay here in case they come looking for us," he called to his companion. The second man looked at the first suspiciously, but he was again tapping with his stick and stooped down to remove some loose stones.

"What's the idea?" he demanded.

"We're supposed to be covering this section and if any of the gang happen to come this way they'll want to know what we're up to. I'll go, if you don't want to."

"I'll go," the second man answered sullenly starting back across the Island. He went on a run and came so close to the children that they held their breaths lest he discover them, but he rushed by, not turning to right or left. As soon as he was out of sight, the first man stood up and looked after him. When he was sure his companion was well on his way, he started toward the tree.

"It's a good thing Pell got the stuff away," Francis whispered excitedly.

Nancy nodded and they watched the solitary searcher run swiftly to the old oak and climb its

trunk. He slipped back several times, but finally reached the hollow branch. Taking another swift look about, he plunged in his hand. He seemed to be feeling inside. Then he climbed a bit higher, so he would have more reach. After a second they saw him grin and when he drew out his hand the children were so amazed they could hardly suppress a scream, for he held the long box tightly in his hand. It was still tied, and without waiting to open it, he slipped it into his pocket, and dropped to the ground. Again he looked about as if uncertain what to do next, then he ran toward the beach, where he was suddenly met by a third man who stepped up to him quietly, and swifter than thought doubled his fist and hit him in the jaw. The first fell with a thud, and the third immediately removed the box and ran swiftly to cover.

The children could keep still no longer, but started to run home as fast as their legs could carry them, which was pretty fast, for they were thoroughly frightened. Over logs and stones they jumped, spilling part of their berries in their haste. Once Robert fell flat, and the others picked him up quickly.

"Are you hurt?" Nancy asked softly.

"A little, my ankle hurts." There was a sob in Bobbie's voice and when he tried to stand, he sat down again quickly, big tears in his eyes.

"Francis, you go on and get the Maxes. I'll stay with Bobbie until he can walk," Nancy insisted.

Without a question Francis ran on. Nancy took off Bobbie's sneaker and rubbed his ankle tenderly. "Lean on me, dear, and we'll get to the beach and bathe it," she persuaded. Slowly they made their way to the shore where Nancy bathed the swelling ankle in the cool water. At first it hurt, but Bobbie bravely stood the pain and after a little it was soothed and he felt relieved.

"I'll sit here with it in the water and you get the berries and my shoe, please," he said.

"All right. I won't be a minute," Nancy ran back up the incline and soon returned with the things they had left behind. "How does it feel now?" she asked.

"Lots better," he assured her.

In the meantime Francis ran swiftly, taking a short cut and paying little attention to where he was going until suddenly he almost bumped into a man who was examining an old stump and some hollow logs.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," he apologized.

"Well, and who might you be?" the man asked.

"Francis Ingram. We were getting berries and Bobbie hurt his foot, so I'm going for my sister Maxine," he explained.

"Where is Bobbie?" the man asked.

Although Francis was anxious to be off, he answered patiently and politely, "I left them back there near the beach. I didn't bring the berries because I couldn't carry them and run. They are not far."

"There seems to be quite a bunch of you," the man said pleasantly.

"There's six," Francis smiled. "Folks call us the Ingram Half Dozen."

"That's interesting. Who else is with you?"

"Larry Nelson was with us. That is, he was camping on the Island with Herbert Seawell, but Mrs. Seawell sent for them last night because they have relatives who just came from abroad."

"Spoiled their camping," the man still smiled.

"Sure did. Well, I've got to go on. Are you looking for berries? There's a lot on the Island. Ripe huckleberries, and blackberries, and loads of wineberries, but they are not quite open yet."

"I'm not looking for berries. I was studying this soil. It's very peculiar."

"Then you must be one of the men who tell the history of how the world was made by comparing the deposits. Dad has told us some about it, and the Maxes study it in school. I'm going to study it too, when I get into high school." Francis smiled disarmingly.

"You'll like it," the man answered.

"I know I shall. Well, I've got to go on. Good-bye."

"Good-bye."

To all outward appearances, Francis was perfectly calm during this discourse, but in reality his heart was thumping so hard he was sure the man would hear it. He had a cold dread feeling that the man might try to prevent him from joining the Maxes, but having learned what he wanted to know, the small boy was allowed to continue on his way. His speed, if it was swift before, was doubly so now, for he raced so hard that when he reached the wharf he sank down on the sand and could only sit there and pant weakly for breath.

Carrol spied him and called, "Hello, Francis, did you get a lot of berries?"

Maxine looked up and instantly saw the small brother's plight. She ran to him quickly. "What is it, dear?" but it was a whole second before he was able to tell them. Maxwell got him a drink of water from the bottle they kept in the *Jr. Black Eagle*. It wasn't very cool, but it washed his throat and finally he was able to gasp:

"Maxes, they found the box."

"You mean the one in the tree?" Maxwell whispered softly.

"Yes, and there's a man right over there beyond the boat-house. He stopped me and

wanted to know who we are, so I told him. And, oh, Bobbie fell and hurt his foot so Nancy is staying with him until you can come to help them."

"Where are they?" Maxwell demanded.

Francis told them, then, finding he was strong enough to stand again he said bravely, "I'll show you the way."

"No, dear, you stay here. I'll find them," and Maxwell ran off keeping close to the beach, and when he thought he had gone far enough stopped and shouted, "Nan, oh Nancy, where are you?"

"Here we are," Nancy answered.

Bobbie was still sitting with his foot in the water, but it was feeling much more comfortable. Maxwell examined it quickly. "No bones broken, just a strain. Now, you put your arms around my neck and I'll take you piggy back to the wharf. Can you carry the berries and his shoes, Nan?"

"Sure," Nan answered cheerfully.

"If you help me I can walk, Maxes," Bobbie declared.

"We'll go quicker the other way, dear, besides it will be better if you don't step on your foot for a while. Maxine is waiting for us and, oh boy, you want to see the boat, it's beautiful!" He helped the little fellow on his back and soon they were making good time along the beach, up the

path past the boat-house, and then they were there. "Ding-a-ling, this is the ambulance," Nancy called. Maxwell set the small boy down where he could get a good view of the *Jr. Black Eagle.*

"Oh, isn't it lovely?" Robert clapped his hands.

"It's simply fine," Nancy declared.

"Immense," Francis assured him.

The *Jr. Black Eagle* was resplendent in flags and bunting that waved very importantly in the breeze, which seemed to be trying to see how many ways it could blow them.

"Suppose we go to the house and have lunch, then they can tell us about the box. It is best not to talk around here because we never can be sure how far our voices carry and who is listening," Maxwell whispered as Maxine stooped over Bobbie to examine the injured ankle. She nodded her head, so taking Bobbie on his back again they went noisily to the house laughing and teasing all the way.

Inside they put Robert on the couch in the library, where they decided to eat, but it was too warm to make a fire. When the meal was finished, Nancy told them softly what they had seen and heard, and Francis described the man who said he was examining the soil. When the tale was finished the Maxes looked at each other a long time.

"They got the box," Nancy lamented.

"I thought you said Mr. Pell had the stuff," Francis said anxiously.

"He has and I guess he left the box in the tree to fool those fellows, but it's full of sawdust and paper," Maxwell told them.

"Oh, goody, goody," Nancy danced up and down.

"When I saw him pull it out of the tree I thought I'd scream," Francis giggled. "Won't they be mad when they open it? I wish we could see them."

"They surely will be mad but we don't want to see them," the Maxes laughed.

"May we go out now and shoot off some of our firecrackers?" Carrol asked.

"I think it will be best to stay here quietly for a while. We will have plenty of time to attend to the fireworks and Bobbie needs to rest his foot a little longer. How does it feel, Old Top?"

"Toppin'," Bobbie laughed but he was content to have it comfortably on the soft pillows and the rest of the children made no objections to the delay. Nancy turned on the radio and they listened to a holiday program half the afternoon, and at last Robert experimented with the foot and pronounced it almost as good as the other. It was black and blue so Maxine bandaged it. Maxwell cut a stout stick to help him

walk, and they went out on the porch where they immediately began a great banging with firecrackers. They shouted with glee at the loudest ones, and the twins watched carefully to see that no one got burned fingers. Even Carrol fired off a few, but she most enjoyed watching the others and they gave her no end of fun.

In the evening the bigger pieces were lighted. The rockets soared off over the harbor and burst into showers of sparks, and every once in a while a rocket would go up from the mainland as if it were coming to meet them. Down at the Point there was an immense display and across the water came the boom of cannon, the shouts of the crowds, and occasionally an especially big rocket would burst in plain sight. Hundreds of lighted balloons floated overhead across the Island out over the Sound where they finally disappeared like blinking stars.

Twice during the evening the children caught sight of Peter hurrying by with his staff, but he paid no heed to them, although Carrol called to him to come and see the fireworks.

"I wouldn't call him, dear," Maxine suggested.

"No. It's better to let him alone at night and he seems pretty busy," Maxwell added, so, although they saw him again, the children did not try to persuade him to leave his duties, whatever they were.

"Wish Larry would come along with his camera in time to take a picture of the *Jr. Black Eagle* before we have to take the flags off," Francis said, as they were going to bed.

"Perhaps he would lend it to us, or come over," Maxwell replied.

"Let's ask him next time we go to Orient," Nancy suggested.

"All right. We may go to-morrow or the next day and we'll see," Maxwell promised.

"Then we can send the pictures to Dad and Mother," Carrol smiled happily at the idea.

CHAPTER X

THE BLACK EAGLE

Two uneventful days passed on Black Eagle Island. Maxwell and Francis took a sail to Orient and looked up the Seawells. Lawrence was glad to have them take pictures of his boat in her Fourth of July attire and loaned them his kodak. The snapshots were taken and were already on their way to be developed and printed. Larry had said he might be over but in case he didn't appear, they could return the camera when they came to the village again.

The Half Dozen were enjoying a swim down near the wharf when they saw Pell's rowboat making its way toward them.

"Hello there. How's sketching?" was Maxwell's greeting.

Pell showed them his pad which was full of drawings. "I'll tell you a secret. I'm a pretty poor sketcher myself, but I got a chap to do these for me."

"If Dad were here he'd make you some dandy ones," Nancy declared.

"I am sure he would and I wish he were here. Now gather around quietly, as if you are inter-

ested in these things, because I want to ask a question or so."

Then he went on, "Did any of you happen to see a fight on the beach Fourth of July? One of my men came along just in time to see two of the gang carry off one of their party and he was pretty badly banged up. They took him to Orient, but not to a hospital. I managed to see the doctor who attended the fellow and he reports his patient has a badly split jaw and a fractured skull, probably caused by falling, when he hit his head on a rock. He hasn't gained consciousness yet."

"That must be the fracas Nancy and Francis saw," Maxine whispered.

"What do you remember about it, Nancy?" Pell asked.

Nancy thought a minute then told him of their search for berries and seeing the two men with sticks and glasses examining the ground and foliage. She repeated the conversation as nearly as she could remember. Pell nodded, and Nancy went on explaining about how they followed the two men, how they saw the one with his glass trained on the hollow tree, and how he sent the first chap back to the boat. She went on with the tale until she came to Robert's fall, then Francis took it up and told of the man he met examining the fallen logs and stumps, the questions he asked

and the explanation he gave of his own presence on the Island.

Pell made a few quick queries and the children answered carefully, then he held out his hand with a smile. "Thank you. You are keen little observers and know how to use your brains."

"Dad taught us that, and so did Mother. They say people don't see half enough and always point out things to us. When they take us places, they ask us afterwards all about what we have seen, or read. We do that at dinner and it's great fun. Every vacation Dad gives us a special treat because we are learning how to notice things and people. Even Carrol got a prize in the first grade because she observed the greatest number of things in a test. She had almost twice as many as any of the others," Maxine told him.

"You have an exceptional pair of parents and are to be congratulated on your choice of them," Pell remarked gravely. They didn't understand exactly what he meant, so Francis asked.

"You are not very big for such a question, Francis, but I'll tell you. I believe children have as much to do with picking out their parents as parents have in picking the children out. When you get older you will understand better what I mean. The difficulty is that the parents often, unfortunately, do not measure up to the baby's ideals, but yours have, I should say."

They all laughed at this because they thought he was having fun with them so he changed the subject and started to say something else. Suddenly he jumped up and slipped out of sight behind some rocks and in a moment more the children knew why he went for they saw a motor-boat coming toward the wharf. When it reached the dock a man in livery stood up and asked respectfully:

"Is Maxwell Ingram here?"

Maxwell stepped forward with Bargulus at his heels. "I am Maxwell Ingram," he said.

"I have a letter for you. I shall wait for an answer, if you please." The man handed him a note. Maxwell tore it open.

"It's from Larry," he shouted. "Listen.

"'DEAR MAXWELL:

Captain Dick has agreed to take us to Greenport on *The Black Eagle*. It leaves Orient at eight o'clock in the morning. Can you all be there? Don't bother to write, just tell the bearer. Mrs. Seawell says for you to plan to have lunch with Herbert and me. The grown-ups are going into the city shopping, so it will be just us. This invitation includes everybody and is from the Seawells as well as myself.

Hope you can come,

LARRY.'

Think we can make it, Maxine?"

" I don't see any reason to prevent. It will be fine."

" Please thank Mrs. Seawell and the boys for us. We'll be at the wharf to-morrow at eight o'clock sharp," Maxwell said.

" Thank you. Master Herbert said to remember it isn't a dress up affair, just every-day togs, sir."

" All right, that's fine," Maxwell told him, so the man turned his boat and quickly disappeared in a great trail of spray. As soon as he was gone, Philip Pell came out from his hiding place.

" I did not know who your caller might be, so I got out of sight. You'll have a great time. *The Black Eagle* is a jolly old tub."

At a quarter before eight the next morning the *Jr. Black Eagle* was tied to the wharf and the Half Dozen stood about her eagerly waiting the appearance of their hosts. In a few minutes a car turned in from the main street and almost as soon as its doors were opened, the two boys jumped out with a shout of welcome.

" Good-morning. It's great you could come. Hurry up, I want you to meet Captain Dick, he's already aboard." Larry and Herbert led the way to the steps where a mild looking man was giving the deck a sweeping. " This is the Ingram Half Dozen, Captain Dick."

The captain looked up and the children met

the kindliest blue eyes twinkling above a smile that seemed a part of the whole man.

"It's very kind of you to take us with you, sir," Maxine said shyly.

"It's very good of you to come," offering his hand to help her to the deck. When they were all aboard, Larry gave the captain their names, and the old gentleman greeted each with a bob. "Now, just sit down here for a few minutes and we will be off," he invited cordially.

Captain Dick was a very small man, short and slender. His deep-set blue eyes looked calmly out through metal-rimmed glasses. There was a lot of grey in his hair and his mustache was white. He wore a brown cap and overalls with a short heavy top-coat and tan shoes. His movements were easy and mild, like his voice, but he was captain and from his place at the wheel his orders were promptly obeyed.

There were four other men on the boat, and soon she swung away from the wharf, her great sail was quickly caught by the wind and she glided easily over the smooth water. The children could hear the pumping of an engine, which accounted for the extra speed they made. In a few minutes Orient was slipping away from them into a misty distance.

"Now you may sit wherever you will be the most comfortable," Captain Dick told them, as he took the wheel. "This is my grandson, Wal-

ter Dick," he introduced a young chap. "Walter works for me in the summer but this fall he's going to leave me and finish school."

"That will be splendid. Are you taking any special course?" Maxwell asked.

"Engineering and wireless," Walter replied, and there was that same quality of quietness in his voice that was in his grandfather's. Another man came out of the hold.

"This is my son, Walter's father," Captain Dick introduced. Except that he was taller and his hair less grey he looked very much like Captain Dick, and he acknowledged the introduction politely.

Maxine took a seat near the wheel where she could watch the captain. "Larry says *The Black Eagle* has been in your family a long time," she ventured.

"My father and uncle bought her in April, 1865, in the spring," he said.

"Why, that was just at the close of the Civil War. It's a long time."

He smiled. "The boat's been remodeled several times, and while she is still *The Black Eagle,* there is really very little left of the original sloop. I've been at the head of the business for thirty-two years and my sons and daughter have an interest in her," he answered.

"You must know almost every drop of water

around here if you have been sailing that long." Maxine's eyes were wide with wonder.

"No. Waters are constantly changing. A few weeks ago on the trip to Montauk a fog came up and we were steering by compass and I went way out of the course. My son had to sound the bottom for half an hour and we had to lay to for quite a spell before I got our bearings. We were in pretty shallow water, less than two fathoms some of the time."

"That must have been exciting," Maxine declared.

"Well, it was for a while. The fog was thick but it wasn't until I drifted near the Promised Land that I was at all sure where I was."

"The Promised Land?"

The captain gave her a big smile. "We could tell it by the smell. It's a Point where there is a huge fish factory of some kind and we picked up the odor quite strong," he chuckled.

"That's a queer name for a fish factory town."

"It is, but I believe it didn't always specialize in canning fish. That man asleep in the rowboat is our cook. He's been with us forty years; he started first with my father."

Two rowboats had been brought on to the deck and they stuck out over the sides like an extra pair of wings. In one of them a little man was doubled up like a jack-knife fast asleep. He had a cap that was green with age pulled

over his head, his nose was long and in his cramped position it hung over his bristling mustache, while his lips were pouting like a child's. He wore a jumper denim suit, well patched at the knees, and an old grey sweater stretched across his chest. His feet, which were the most conspicuous part of him, were encased in strong shoes made of rubber and canvas and laced tight about his ankles.

"He doesn't look very comfortable," Maxine whispered.

"Oh, he is. He's not very big and he folds up easily in a small space. That other man sitting beside him is one of our best fishermen. He's been fishing with us a long time and all his life he has collected things of one kind or another. Has a whole room for them in his home. He was recently offered a thousand dollars for the lot, but he didn't take it. His son is a promising young naturalist. If you happen to be around Orient in the daytime, or even in the evening, you'll probably see him with his net getting beetles or butterflies. His name is Wallace Lothrop."

Maxine looked at the elder Lothrop, who, at that moment, was devouring a huge sandwich, taking the whole thing in about four bites. He wore a broad-brimmed hat, that had seen better days, and a brown corduroy suit of the same appearance. His face was covered with a short

beard, but his eyes were blue and when he caught Maxine looking at him he greeted her with a friendly twinkle.

"They tell me he has a collection of over two hundred varieties of birds' eggs. Boys were allowed to collect them when he was younger, provided they never took more than one from a nest. But they may not do that any more. People realize the importance of birds in communities and do all they can to get as many as will come."

"Yes, I know they have societies now and it's against the law to kill them. I am glad of that. I like birds. There are lots of them around the Island," Maxine volunteered.

The captain nodded. "Two years ago *The Black Eagle* broke her cable and went ashore on the rocks. We had a trying time getting her off. There was a terrific storm and it beat her timbers so badly we thought we would never be able to repair her, but we did finally. That's the first real accident we have had in forty years."

Although he spoke of it quietly, Maxine realized that the affair had been a most serious one and that the loss of *The Black Eagle* would be a hardship to those who were depending upon her for their livelihood. "You get a great many fish every week?" she asked.

"Oh yes, sometimes the deck is thick with them. We have several trapping grounds and visit them every day we spend in Montauk. The

catch is packed in ice and shipped to the cities on a railroad that has built a dock out in Fort Bay. Usually we return to Orient Thursday evening because the fish market is not good over the week end. Many of the people who purchase them sell them off at little or nothing to get rid of them and that does not pay any of us."

"It must be a wonderful life, on the sea most of the time."

"We like it and I have seven or eight grandsons who will probably take up the work when we older chaps can manage it no longer. The sea takes quite a hold of most of the men, and some of the women too, in my family. My wife goes with me every trip. She has done that for fifty years. Her own people followed the same profession."

"Come on and see them mend the nets," Maxwell called, so his twin joined him at the bow of the boat where the captain's son and grandson were busy examining long handled scoop nets, and where a cord was weak or broken, they repaired it with a shuttle arrangement which they wove in and out.

"Isn't this great?" Larry demanded.

"It certainly is," Maxine agreed.

The boat had passed the lighthouse and was making its way through a narrow stretch of water. They passed other craft of various description, and from every vessel came a cheery

call to Captain Dick. Even a very aristocratic steam launch, whose owner lounged comfortably under an awning, did not omit the greeting. The man in white duck suit stood up when *The Black Eagle* went by and waved in the same friendly fashion, and a little further on, a tall chap in a rowboat who was fishing for round crabs, shouted cordially to the folks on the sloop.

" Everybody knows her," Larry exclaimed happily, " and everybody likes Captain Dick."

The boat was drawing in so close to the town of Greenport that its low buildings were plainly discernible from the shore.

" They get ice here to take with them to Montauk," Herbert explained as the boat swung in to the dock.

The next hour was a busy one on *The Black Eagle*. Huge cakes of ice were stored in her hold. The captain's son went ashore to attend to several commissions and returned when the last of the load was stowed away. The return trip was most enjoyable, and it was a little after noon when *The Black Eagle* was again tied at the wharf in Orient.

" Thank you for taking us," the children cried to Captain Dick as they clambered ashore. The car that had brought Larry and Herbert was awaiting them and soon they were all being whizzed through the peaceful streets, past busy farms and finally up a winding hill road that

twisted and turned through thick woods until it stopped before a long, low home, overlooking the Sound.

"Here we are," Herbert laughed.

As the children trooped up the steps a lady appeared in the doorway. "Did you have a pleasant sail?" she asked.

"We surely did, Mother. I thought you were going to New York with Aunt Nell. Gee, I'm glad you are at home." He kissed her affectionately and with his arm still about her waist, smiled proudly as he presented her. "This is the Ingram Half Dozen, Mother."

The Half Dozen saw a tall, slender woman, with delicate hands and deep blue eyes. Her hair was wavy brown brushed back from her forehead and caught in the back with a high comb. Looking at her it was hard to believe she could have a son as big as Lincoln. Her skin was as soft and clear as Maxine's, and she greeted them exactly as if she were a young girl.

"I am glad to see you. Aunt Nell wanted to call on some old friends in the city. Lincoln is with her so I decided I would have luncheon with the rest of my children," she smiled quite as if all children were hers and the Ingrams didn't wonder that Herbert was so proud of her. "I expect you are ready to eat, so hustle yourselves, my dears," she invited.

Herbert escorted his guests to the second floor and opened bathroom doors. "You'll find everything there that you want. What you do not see, please call for. Make yourselves comfortable, and don't forget to hustle," he laughed.

When at last they were ready he led them down to the living-room where a huge robin's-egg blue table was charmingly and temptingly arranged. In the center was a great blue bowl full of flowers that seemed symbolic of their mistress. The china and glasses were hand painted in beautiful designs that set them off distinctively.

Mrs. Seawell assigned places, getting all the Ingram names where they belonged and chatting easily. She asked about the morning trip, about their dog, and in a few minutes the Half Dozen found themselves talking with her as if they had known her all their lives. She watched their plates without seeming to and showed an amazing understanding of their likes. From her seat Maxine could look through the group of windows. Just outside was a long box of jolly looking flowers—pansies, petunias, deep blue ones, and forget-me-nots. Under the windows were clumps of blue hydrangea which were so tall their blossoms peeked in on the family. A short distance away was a row of giant willows and through their feathery leaves the waters of the Sound made a striking background. The young

girl could hardly take her eyes off the scene and it wasn't until her hostess smilingly told her that she was not eating her lunch that Maxine was recalled to the duty at hand. The predominating color of the room was blue with an occasional gayer shade here and there. There was a high organ especially manufactured to harmonize with the furniture, a low vase of flowers and two blue elephant candlesticks on top of it, while its tone chamber was like a long grating in the ceiling. Blue wall pockets, also filled with flowers, hung on each side of the wide doorway above built-in settees. At the back of the room was a fireplace in which hung a hospitable looking black kettle and the necessary irons leaned against the brick sides. An immense, high-backed couch with deep cushions was drawn up in front of the fireplace and Maxine thought how wonderfully cosy it must be to snuggle there with a book, or even nothing but the fascinating blaze and its delightful, constantly changing castles to hold one's attention. To the left was a deep recess filled with music rolls for the organ. Another settee, and then a spacious bookcase; the books in neat rows invited their lovers to browse. There were no pictures on the walls, only a few delicate tapestries, and the window drapings made of soft grey batiked material with a wide blue border.

The Ingrams could be excused for their ad-

miring observation and Maxine felt, rather than thought, that an immense amount of love was spent in planning the home before it assumed its present exquisite perfection. She looked up in time to meet the kind eyes of her hostess and very much wanted to go and put her arms around Herbert's mother and she knew that if she did, Mrs. Seawell would understand, just as her own mother would.

"I think we are ready for dessert, Katie," Mrs. Seawell said to the trim little brown maid who served them efficiently. She wore a smile, as if she was a part of the place and appreciative of the beauty that surrounded her. The dessert was a delicious custard with wineberry sauce and tiny cakes. "This is one of my son's favorite dishes, so Katie always makes a quantity. Let me help you to some more," Mrs. Seawell persuaded and although the children had really eaten heartily they could not resist the invitation, and Katie's entire supply disappeared promptly enough to satisfy the heart of any good cook.

Lunch over, the children played on the lawn for an hour, then went for a swim, the Ingrams attired from an extra supply of bathing suits belonging to different members of the family. Mrs. Seawell went in with them. She wore an orange suit, that looked exactly the right thing for her, and was a clever swimmer, thoroughly

enjoying the water through which she went with an ease equal to that of the children.

On shore again, the Half Dozen bethought themselves of the sail home. Thanking their hostess, they went again in the big car along the winding road to the wharf, Lawrence and Herbert with them.

"We had a whale of a time," Maxwell declared as they said good-bye to the boys.

"Glad you could come," Larry responded.

"You know the way, drop in when you feel like it," Herbert added.

"Thank you, we will," Maxine promised.

The *Jr. Black Eagle* that had waited patiently all day now carried them back to Black Eagle Island. The Half Dozen were surprised that Bargulus was not on the wharf to welcome them nor did the dog seem to realize the children were at home.

"Here, Bargulus, old fellow, where are you?" Francis called, but heard no answering bark.

The children ran through the house, around the garden, off to the barn and into the outhouses, calling as they went, but not a glimpse did they catch of their pet. They discovered Osric crouched in a rafter in the lean-to and Nancy had to climb after him because he simply refused to be coaxed from his place. "Bargulus, Bargulus," they shouted, getting really alarmed.

"Where do you suppose he is?" Carrol asked.

"He may have wandered off after a squirrel or something," Maxwell suggested. "By the time we get supper he will come back."

But supper was finished and dishes rattled to attract his attention without avail. Suddenly Maxine discovered Francis, who had thrown himself on the lawn and was crying bitterly.

"Francis, darling, what is the matter?" she asked, although she knew well enough.

"I just know somebody has done away with Bargulus," the little fellow cried, burying his head in her arms. There were tears in Maxine's eyes, for the little Boston Bull was dear to all of them.

"You don't really know that something has happened to him, Francis, and I don't believe that while we were having such a beautiful day, anything would harm our dog. Let's be real brave and take a good look for him. He may have roamed off somewhere on the Island and we will surely find him," she soothed.

Francis struggled manfully against the tears that just would come but finally he wiped his eyes, and the Half Dozen started out to make a thorough search. They went to the boat-house, along the beach, and across the Island, calling as they went. "Bargulus, Bargulus, old fellow, where are you? Come, Bargulus," but he didn't come and at last it was getting dark and they had to go back to the house.

It was a sad little group that finally sank wearily on the porch, and no one spoke a word. Each one thought that some of the bootlegging gang had done something to the dog during their absence and a queer feeling of helplessness came over them.

" Well, guess we'd better go to bed," Maxine said, although she hated to give up the search. Wearily the children trudged into the house. The little folks were tucked in, but their eyes and ears were wide open, and the Maxes knew it would be a long time before any of them would go to sleep. They went downstairs quietly and sat for a long time in the library.

" I'm thinking those fellows were here to-day and Bargulus went for them so they killed him," Maxwell said chokily. Maxine nodded, but she couldn't say a word.

" So many things are happening, Maxes, I'm beginning to wonder if we would better get word to Father," she said when at last she found her voice steady.

" I've been thinking that too. Good old Bargulus was a protection and I don't believe Dad would want us to be here entirely alone," he admitted.

They sat for half an hour thinking it over when suddenly they heard a very soft step on the porch and the gentlest of taps. Maxwell jumped up and saw Peter's face pressed close to

the window. The boy opened the door and the man came in quickly. He wore a long coat and carried something heavy under his arm.

"The Lord taketh away and He bringeth back," he grinned, depositing Bargulus on the couch.

Instantly the dog sprang into Maxine's arms and began licking her face at a furious rate. He leaped at Maxwell so hard that the boy sat down, but that was all right for he could fling his arms around the little beast and hug him close. Bargulus panted and snuffled and scrambled from one to another, then, remembering the anxious ones upstairs, Maxine caught his head gently and said:

"Go find the children, you dear old rascal," and off went the dog scrambling wildly up the stairs. In a moment the Maxes could hear happy screams as Bargulus raced from one to the other. He jumped on their beds, snuggled contentedly with each one a moment, then raced away to another.

"Bargulus, Bargulus," Francis cried. He really cried, but they were glad tears, and the dog kissed them away as fast as they fell. At last, when all were assured that he was safe, he curled up in Francis' arms and after a few more happy giggles, all was quiet and peaceful on the second floor.

"You were awfully good to bring him, Peter,"

Maxwell said, and then he noticed that Peter was not the simple looking fellow he had been masquerading. His hair was properly combed, his mouth was closed, except when it was necessary to open it, he stood up straight and did not carry a staff and wore a neat suit and shoes.

"The boss told me to take him away this morning; he thought the pup might be in some danger here alone. I tried to get him, but it was no use, he almost ate me up, but Pell came and coaxed him, and we got him into the boat and took him to a friend's who cared for him all day. We hoped to get him back before you returned, but a funny thing happened. Pell's friend has a youngster, a mite of a chap just toddling, and he and your dog took a great shine to each other. We had to wait until the baby was asleep before we could take the dog away and I sailed over as fast as I could. With your permission, I'll sleep to-night in your library. Pell tells me it is very comfortable, and he thinks it is better that you are not alone. Is that agreeable?"

"Of course it is," Maxwell exclaimed heartily.

"All right. I have my disguise and I may slip out in the morning before you are up."

"That will be splendid. We'll be up early and give you some breakfast, even if you have to eat it on the back porch," Maxine added.

"Thanks, and if you find me without my dis-

guise in the morning, you might call me uncle—Uncle George—from New England who has come down for some fishing on Black Eagle Island."

CHAPTER XI

KIDNAPPED

PETER had disappeared when the children came down the next morning, but before they had finished breakfast he came shambling to the back door and pounded with his staff on the step. "Let the ravens feed the lambs of the Lord," he called, so Maxwell and Carrol took him something to eat. Maxine had expected him to come and had prepared coffee, although none of the Half Dozen drank it.

"Thank you for taking care of our dog," Francis said looking curiously at Peter. "Say," the boy said suddenly, "I don't believe that you are crazy at all."

"Did you believe it before?" Peter asked quickly.

"Yes, but I don't now."

"What has made you change your mind?" Peter wanted to know.

"Because you brought back our dog. If you were crazy you would not have thought of taking care of him."

"But I look exactly as I did before, don't I?" Peter demanded anxiously.

Francis scrutinized him with great care. "Yes," he admitted, "you look exactly as you did before."

"That's good. I was afraid for a minute that I had forgotten something in my make-up. I'm not crazy, that is, not any more so than most people, but I'm working with Philip Pell. Will you be careful not to let anyone know what you have discovered? Only the Maxes know it."

"Sure, I'll watch out," Francis agreed with a broad smile. "I'm glad you are not crazy because I like you; you were good to Bargulus."

"Thanks. Now the lamb of the Lord must be on his way," he said, and pulling his hair down further into his eyes, Peter shambled toward the barn leaning heavily on his staff, and Francis kept his lips tight closed so the secret wouldn't get out because he had been alone with Peter while they talked.

"We need quite a number of things from the village, Maxwell, and I'm wondering if we couldn't all sail over to-day and see more of Orient," Maxine told her twin.

"That is agreeable to me, Sis. We can take Larry's camera back, have a walk and get the mail. I'll get our good ship ready. All aboard in half an hour."

In half an hour everybody, including Bargulus and Osric, was being carried by the *Jr. Black Eagle* toward Orient and in due time the

wee craft arrived safely at the wharf. The children climbed ashore, Nancy carried the cat and Bargulus was close at Francis' heels, because the Half Dozen could not think of leaving their pets alone on the Island. They went to the store, the post-office, the Idle Hour for ice-cream, and finally across the Island, through the woods to the Sound. They stopped at Captain Oakley's house, but it was still closed tight, and then they made their way to the old burying ground where Maxwell showed them the tool house and the ancient graves. They exclaimed delightedly over the place, read the dim records, and at last reluctantly climbed the wall. A little later they found themselves on a high point of land overlooking a dozen neat farms that lay like a patchwork quilt before them.

"It's simply beautiful. I hope Dad and Mother can come here sometime; they will love it too," Maxine said softly.

The children had covered about half the distance to the monument when suddenly Francis remembered that they had not returned Larry's camera, which hung in its case across his shoulder. The name, Lawrence Nelson, was printed in plain gold letters on the flap.

"I'll run up with it. I know the way and it isn't far," he suggested.

"That will be better than the whole troop marching in on them," Maxwell thought.

"We can go slowly and meet you at the wharf," Maxine agreed. So off the small boy started at a brisk trot, while the others continued leisurely on their way. They stopped at the corner to watch a tennis match and at last, growing tired of that, they proceeded slowly down the street, pausing every once in a while to look beyond the snug little houses toward the lovely harbor back of them. Finally deciding that Francis must soon overtake them, they went on, stopping at the store to pick up their packages and to run in and see if there was any more mail. When they reached the wharf their brother had not arrived, so they watched hundreds of barrels of potatoes being loaded into ships. While they were there, Captain Jim came along and Maxwell was delighted that his brother and sisters could meet the Civil War veteran, who proudly showed them his bullets and chatted very much as he had to Maxwell on their first meeting. He repeated the story of the time he spent in the hospital and remarked with great satisfaction that he still wasn't "a goner."

"You were right about the storm that day," Maxwell admitted. "I barely got across in time."

Captain Jim smiled. "It was quite a blow when it got here. You were lucky it held off as long as it did." Then hearing a bell ringing somewhere, he added, "I must be going. My

daughter will have dinner ready and women folk do not like to be kept waiting."

"Good-bye," the children called after him.

"Isn't he nice?" Carrol whispered, as Captain Jim turned off into the main street.

"Wonder what's keeping Francis?" Robert commented. "People are cooking around here and the smells make me hungry."

"Guess we all feel the same way. Francis will be along in a few minutes now. He probably stopped for a chat with the boys," Maxwell answered.

The empty trucks were all gone and most of the men were having their dinner, but the children played for half an hour, until at last, growing impatient, Maxwell declared:

"I'll go and meet Francis. He shouldn't stay so long. You fellows wait here. I don't think I can miss him, but in case I do, I'll be back in a jiffy or two."

The boy hurried along expecting every minute to meet his brother, but he reached the monument, passed it, and turned in the winding roadway, still without a glimpse of Francis. "He should not have stayed, but I suppose he got interested in something," Maxwell said to himself when at last he arrived at the Seawell home.

His knock was promptly answered by Katie, who greeted him with a smile. "Good-morning.

Will you please tell my brother Francis that we are waiting for him?" Maxwell said politely.

Katie looked puzzled. "Will you-all step inside?" she invited.

"I'd just as soon wait here," Maxwell told her.

The maid disappeared into the house and in a minute Larry came running through the hall, followed by Lincoln Seawell. "Hello, come on in. We did not quite understand Katie. What is it?" Larry asked.

"I came up for Francis," Maxwell told them and a vague misgiving tugged at his heart.

"Francis hasn't been here," Larry assured him.

"Come on in the living-room. Mother's there," Lincoln invited.

"Guess I'd better find my brother," Maxwell hesitated.

"No. Come on in a minute, then we'll help you," Lincoln insisted.

They ushered him into the room where Mrs. Seawell waited for him. "Where is your brother? Or rather, what makes you think he came here?"

Quickly Maxwell told her that Francis had started to return the camera but had not come back to the wharf where they were waiting for him.

"Sit down, dear, I want to get this straight.

You say your brother started up here a little before eleven."

"Yes, Mrs. Seawell."

"We have been here all morning and no one of us has seen your brother. He has not been here. Are you sure he would not stop somewhere on the way?" she asked kindly.

"I just came up over the same road and didn't pass him. Francis wouldn't go off like that because he knew we were going back to the Island," Maxwell assured her.

Mrs. Seawell was thoughtful a moment. At last she said slowly, "A very peculiar thing has happened. It may have nothing to do with your brother and then it may, so I am going to tell you, but try not to be needlessly alarmed. A few minutes after eleven our telephone rang and Lincoln answered it. We decided the message was a hoax of some kind and had almost forgotten it when you came. Tell him what that person said over the 'phone, Lincoln."

"I took off the receiver and said hello three or four times, and then when I was about to hang up again, a man's voice spoke. He asked if this was the Seawells', and when I told him it was, he wanted to know who was speaking. I told him that too, then he said, 'Listen sharp, we got Larry Nelson so you needn't bother to look for him and if his family settle up with us without a fuss, he won't be hurt.' Then he hung up. I

tried to get him back, but couldn't so I came to tell Mother and in walks Larry. He'd been upstairs with Herbert working on the radio and had not been out of the house, so we thought it must be one of those fool practical jokers, but Mother told the boys to stay in the house, just as a precautionary measure," Lincoln finished.

Maxwell's face was white and his mouth was set in a straight line. "Francis had Larry's camera swung over his shoulder, and Larry's name is on the front of it. I bet those fellows took him thinking he was Larry. Anyway, I'm glad you are all right, old chap," he said bravely to Lawrence.

"Have you had your lunch?" Mrs. Seawell asked.

"No, thanks, I'll get some later. The rest are down at the wharf and we'll have to find Francis," he answered.

"I will send the car for your brother and sisters, Maxwell. Lincoln can go after them and Katie will fix up a lunch for all of you. Now, tell me what you have in your mind to do about finding Francis. If you want to send a message to your father you can wire from here," she insisted kindly.

"That would break Mother all up, Mrs. Seawell. You see, she's just getting along fine. She's been sick for over a year and if nothing happens to worry her, Dr. Sully says she will be

all right in a few weeks more. I suppose I should send word to Dad, but I—I hate to." There was a big sob in Maxwell's throat and Mrs. Seawell took his hand kindly.

"There, there. It's just as well not to go wiring your father unless we can't do anything else. I'll get in touch with my brother in New York and he can send us someone who will find Francis. I have been thinking, too, that when the kidnappers discover they have the wrong boy, they will be glad to turn him off or bring him back," she said cheerily.

The idea of someone helping them find Francis brought Philip Pell to Maxwell's mind. "There's a man in Orient. I am not at liberty to tell who he is, but if I could get word to him, he'd help us," the boy announced eagerly. "He's staying at a Mrs. Vail's and she has a telephone. I was looking at his card yesterday and I know the number."

Mrs. Seawell smiled. "Go right to the 'phone, dear, and if he will, tell him to come up here."

Just then the honk of Lincoln's auto woke the echoes as that young man started toward the village.

Maxwell was able to get the number and his heart jumped with gladness when, in answer to his inquiry, he was told that Mr. Pell was in the dining-room. A moment more and Pell's lazy

hello came like music to the boy's ears. "This is Maxwell Ingram, Mr. Pell. I am at Mrs. Seawell's. Can you come right up, please? We need your help a lot," he said into the 'phone.

"Be with you in fifteen minutes," Pell answered.

Philip Pell and Lincoln arrived at almost the same instant, and as the children were seated around the table, the situation was placed before them and the supposed artist. Pell listened quietly, then drew a long whistle.

"This telephone message is the only one you have had, Mrs. Seawell?" he wanted to know.

"The only one," she answered.

Turning to Larry, Pell asked, "Did anyone speak to you on the road, or invite you to ride, or offer you anything, say money or candy?"

"No, sir," Larry answered promptly. "You see, Herb and I were working on the radio ever since we finished breakfast. I have not been out of the house, not even for a swim."

"Think a minute. Has anyone during the past few days, any stranger, made advances to you?"

"No, sir," Larry insisted.

"That's good. Now, Mrs. Seawell, will you please instruct your servants, every one of them, that a threatening communication has been received regarding Master Larry, and to watch out for suspicious characters, peddlers, tramps,

and so forth? Also, in case anyone tries to hand them a message to be delivered to any member of the family, the messenger must be detained, no matter who it is?"

"I shall be glad to do that," the lady assured him and left the room to carry out the commission.

"Can you give me an idea just the route Francis would take up here? I judge he has not been here often and will not know more than one."

Maxwell told the detective exactly where his brother had left them and the way he would take. He described the small boy's clothes, which were ones Pell had seen, so there would be no difficulty in identification. "We have not sent word to Dad," Maxwell ended.

"Perhaps it will not be necessary. Now I am going down to the village and do a little scouring around. I shall get in touch with you the minute I have any word."

Mrs. Seawell returned. "I want the children to stay here. I should feel very uncomfortable if they returned to Black Eagle Island alone. As you have brought your dog and cat, I'm sure you have no family cares to call you home. You can all play anywhere in the house provided you are not far from my eagle eye," she laughed.

"That is the best plan in the world," Mr. Pell added.

"Thank you, Mrs. Seawell. There is only Bess," Maxine managed to say.

None of the children were a bit talkative and it was only after much persuasion that they ate any lunch although Katie had made it as tempting as she possibly could for them. When it was finished, Linc took them up to the gymnasium to do stunts, all except Maxine who preferred to stay in the library where she tried to read a book, but she went over the first page a dozen times without understanding a word of what she saw. She kept wondering what was happening to Francis and unpleasant pictures of her small brother's danger kept running through her mind until a great tear splashed on the white page and others threatened to follow. Mrs. Seawell came and sat beside her, putting her arm around Maxine's shoulder.

"Larry and Herbert have told me how brave the Half Dozen have been, and how you have managed without your housekeeper. If I were your mother I should be very proud of you, dear, but, if I were your mother, no matter how ill I was, I should be more content if I was sure you were not hiding anything from me. No matter what it is, mothers have a habit of wanting to know everything that is going on in their children's lives," she said very softly.

"We never keep anything from Mother, but this time it just didn't seem fair, when she was

getting well so fast, to tell them anything that would spoil it and we have managed fine so far. She'll scold us and love us for not telling her, but if she is only well, everything will be all right, but I don't know how we can ever tell them about Francis," Maxine sobbed.

"By the time you tell them he will be back with you," Mrs. Seawell said assuringly. "Who is this Mr. Pell, that is, do your family know him?"

"No. He came to the Island one day. Mrs. Seawell, he asked us not to talk about him, but he's trying to catch a gang of bootleggers and thieves and he has had someone on the Island all the time to look after us. He has really been awfully good and none of us ever felt a bit afraid of him. He told us if we needed help to send for him where he lived or hang a white cloth on the Point where he could see it. Maxwell said he came here right away when he asked him to come," Maxine explained brokenly.

"Where does he think the bootleggers and thieves are—on Black Eagle Island?" Mrs. Seawell asked quietly and Maxine nodded her head. A few more questions and Mrs. Seawell had almost the whole story and her face was very serious indeed. "You children have been through altogether too much, dear," she said. "You see, if you had let your father know the maid did not come, he could have started a search for her and

made other arrangements for you. I never met your mother or father, but they are well known and have a great many friends, I am sure, who would have been only too happy to help them this summer, or any time."

"Yes, I guess we should have told Dad," Maxine admitted but it did not make her feel any better.

"Do not think, dear, that I am criticizing what you have done. You have been fine to want to save them, but fathers and mothers are a queer lot, honey; none of us ever want our children to face danger alone if we can help it." She drew Maxine's head on to her shoulder as she talked and the young girl felt wonderfully comforted. They talked a few minutes more, then were interrupted by a cheery:

"Hello, Fellas!"

"Why, Charles, you darling, I didn't expect you for two weeks," Mrs. Seawell said happily. "Maxine, this is my husband, this is Maxine Ingram, and we are both glad you are back. Come into my room, dear, we want to have an uninterrupted chat."

She led her husband and Maxine into her own room and drew up chairs. When they were seated, she told Mr. Seawell about the Half Dozen and how they happened to come to the Island, about Jane's non-appearance, about the bootleggers, and about Francis' disappearance,

the threat against Larry, and about Mr. Pell. "It's good you are here in time, dear. I had made up my mind to telephone Paul."

"Hum-m, some experience even for a Half Dozen," Mr. Seawell said with a frown. Then he asked a number of questions and did it in such a kind manner that Maxine liked him immensely and her heart felt lighter than it had for the past two hours. Mr. Seawell was tall, well built, and pleasant looking. His hair was heavy with just a tiny wave, his forehead was wide, and his eyes were deep set under long shaggy eyebrows. He wore shell-rimmed glasses and there was a little humorous twist to his lips as if he found a great deal in life and enjoyed every bit of it.

"You say you do not know this man Pell?" he said.

"No, sir, not until he came to the Island."

"Well, he seems to have been nice to you," Mr. Seawell smiled.

"Yes, sir, he has."

"And you gave him the jewels that your brother hid in the radio coil. Did he ever give you a list of them?"

"Not yet; he gave us a receipt and said as soon as he made a list, he would give us a copy."

"I see. Well, don't you worry, Maxine. We'll get this all straightened out, without hurting your mother one bit, but I shouldn't keep

things from them again, if I were you. Grown-ups have a great idea of their importance, and sometimes you have to humor them," he chuckled a bit and, despite her anxiety, Maxine had to laugh.

Just then they heard a car coming up the road and Mr. Seawell went out to see who it might be. Maxine and Mrs. Seawell followed into the living-room, because it might be word of Francis, and they heard Mr. Seawell exclaim heartily:

"Why, hello, Pellman, thought you were in Washington."

"I'm supposed to be, old chap. Hello yourself. Had no idea this is your place." The two men came inside and the two ladies were amazed to see that Mr. Pellman was no other than Philip Pell.

"I want you to meet Mrs. ——"

"I've already met her, only under my other name. They call me Pell around here and I'm supposed to be a half baked marine artist."

"So you are the mysterious Mr. Pell. Well, I might have known. Now sit down and tell us what you make of this case. Have you any trace of the little boy? My dear, although very few people know it, Pellman is the man highest up in the Federal Service in Washington. You have heard me speak of him."

Mrs. Seawell smiled. "You have had us mystified, Mr. Pellman, and now that I know who

you are, I am more than glad we are in touch with you."

"There must be something big to bring you to Orient," Mr. Seawell declared.

"There is," then leaning over he touched Maxine's hand. "And let me tell you an open secret, this Half Dozen are a great little bunch of youngsters and have helped me no end. I am sorry the small brother got caught in the trap, but I'm sure we will have him safe in a few hours. I traced him up to your road, and I saw his footsteps along the drive when he must have stepped aside for a car. I am of the opinion that whoever was in the car grabbed the boy, thinking he was Nelson's son. Every road and every car that has gone through since ten o'clock this morning is being checked up in all the surrounding states, also every boat, and I have my men combing the country around here, all the old houses and shacks. Luckily I have a big force working with me and I've turned them all loose on the job," he grinned.

"That's fine. It isn't often that one small boy gets the services of the head of the department. It's almost like having the President of the United States looking after one."

"Yes, and he took care of our dog, too," Maxine laughed.

"He's a mighty nice dog, but he made love to my friend's baby and now they have to get him

one because all he says is, 'doggy, baby want doggy,' Pellman told them.

While they were talking Katie appeared at the door.

"What is it?" Mrs. Seawell asked.

"The chauffeur is holding a girl who brought a letter, and he wants to know what he is to do with her. They are in the kitchen, sir."

"May we go out?" Pellman asked.

"Of course, come right along."

They went into the kitchen and saw the big chauffeur holding the arm of a small, frightened little girl. She wore a plaid dress, several sizes too large for her, but her feet and head were bare. She pulled desperately, but her captor held her firmly.

"She started to hand me a note, sir, so I caught her. Those were the Madam's instructions, sir."

"Quite right, Dudley."

Pellman took the note and read it. 're asking fifty thousand dollars ransom and expect you to advise the Nelsons to pay up. Those fellows are always so modest in their demands. Where did you get this, little girl?"

"A man gave it to me," she answered sullenly.

"Did you know the man?"

"No."

"Did you ever see him before?"

"No."

"Where were you when he gave it to you?"

"In the woods."

"What were you doing?"

"Picking berries."

"What did he say to you?"

"He told me to give it to one of the servants."

"Did he say which one?"

"No."

"Chatty little thing, aren't you? How much did he give you for bringing the note, how much money?"

"Twenty-five cents," she answered reluctantly.

"I don't wonder that you hesitate to mention the sum, it's princely. Katie, will you please ask my assistant to come here?" Pellman asked.

"Yes, sir," Katie answered and sped away on her errand. The assistant appeared in a moment.

"Dan, this child was bribed to the extent of twenty-five cents for delivering a note to one of the Seawell servants. Make her show you over the ground and take her home and find out who her people are. You know what to do. If she is telling the truth give her ten cents more to add to her pile, if she isn't, round up the family."

"Very good, sir."

"Well, that's that," Pellman said when they returned to the library. "This gang must have several simpletons in it or they never would kid-

nap a boy whose parents are on the other side of the ocean. I judge several individuals in the crowd are conducting a few turns on the side and the big boss is not entirely in their confidence. That's always a bad sign in a gang. It shows dissatisfaction in the ranks."

"Be too much to ask just what your idea is?" Mr. Seawell ventured.

"I've got the gang, that is the little fry, well rounded up and where I can clap my hands on almost every one of them when I am ready to do it. I am expecting the latest developments to bring the leaders down and I am waiting for them."

"Any idea who they are?"

"I know who they are, but in order to have absolute proof, I want to catch them together and finish up their activities. They have been doing business for a long time, and it will be a good thing to retire them, as it were," Pellman told them.

Although he spoke in a half jesting manner, Maxine knew that he was very much in earnest. The fact that her brother was in the clutches of such a gang made her choke and again the tears sprang to her eyes.

"Do you think they will hurt Francis?" she asked.

"No, my dear, I do not. You see, when kidnappers are trying to get money out of people,

they treat their hostage fairly decently, as long as there is any chance to get it, and until they know just how the Nelsons are going to take this they will not hurt your brother. I've had cables sent to them, and some of our men on the other side will get in touch with them and ease their minds by telling them the true state of affairs—that their son is quite safe. Our men will suggest that the Nelsons delay as much as possible. A little time is all we need. I explained this to you so you will not worry too much," he said kindly.

"Thank you," she said with a little sigh.

"I am going to keep the children here for the present," Mrs. Seawell told her husband who grinned.

"That's great. I've always wanted a house full of youngsters and this addition of a half dozen promises to be very interesting. By the way, Phil, just how do you want us to act during this little play?" he asked.

"Nice and distracted. I want you to go rushing down to the telegraph office, write a pad full of messages and tear them up. Go any place else you can think of. Be sure to tear. Keep Master Nelson absolutely out of sight. Instruct the servants that if anyone asks for him, on the telephone or in any way, he is not here. Keep the shades drawn and whenever you can get up a real distressed look, peep out of the win-

dows, so that any watchers will see at a glance that you are taking it terribly," was Pellman's answer.

"All right," Mr. Seawell agreed and rumpled his wife's hair. "You are altogether too neat-looking for a distracted guardian," he told her, when she started to protest, so she took out her comb and let him have his way. Then he rang for Katie. "Tell Dudley to bring the car around," he requested.

In a few minutes Dudley blew the horn that he was ready. Mr. Seawell, frowning deeply, his glasses in his hand, his collar and tie awry, jumped in, put the chauffeur out, and the car went drunkenly off down the path. The shades were drawn, and Mrs. Seawell had no difficulty looking alarmed, for she thought her husband would surely break his neck.

"May I see Master Lawrence?" Pellman asked.

In a few minutes the boy came in the room. "This gentleman is a friend, a trusted friend of my husband and also your father, Larry. We want you to do exactly as he directs, dear."

"You have been kidnapped, Larry, and the whole Seawell household is wild with anxiety. I want you to stay in one of the rooms and be very careful that no outsider sees you. Any engagements that you have will have to be broken. I mean by that, just don't go, and do not call up

anyone to explain. Think you can act as if you had suddenly disappeared?"

"Yes, sir, I think I can. That will help you get Francis back, won't it?" the boy wanted to know.

"You have the idea. When we get him back, you can explain your unusual behavior to your friends. Someone will be with you all the time and I have this place closely watched, so you are in no danger," Pellman told him.

"I'll go back to the gym and take some books. The windows there face the cliff, but I'll keep away from them, sir," the boy answered.

"That will be fine. Have you an especially faithful man servant you can spare as a watchman? I'd like your sons to do a little tearing too, also a lot of consoling."

"Hamilton is good and he really belongs to the Nelsons. They left him with us while they are abroad," Mrs. Seawell answered.

Hamilton, Herbert and Lincoln were called in and instructed in their parts, and in a few minutes the Seawell household had all the appearance of one that had suddenly been struck by a cyclone. The servants ran when they went out of doors, answered the telephone as if they had lost their wits, the shades were drawn tight and every few minutes a frightened face would peep through the blinds then jerk back in a panic. If they had been trained for the movies, they could

not have done better. Larry and Hamilton were in the gym, the colored man lying at full length on the floor under the windows, while his charge tried to read, and finally failing in that, they brought him Herbert's collection of radio parts and he fell to work building a set, which took all of his attention for hours. His meals were brought surreptitiously and a cot was made up for him in Mr. Seawell's room, so that no light could show from his own. Mr. Seawell came tearing back in his car, only to dash off again, and even Linc drove recklessly to the village, to the wharf, down to the Point and back, as if on some desperate mission.

It was late when the five solemn little Ingrams went to bed, not forgetting to say an extra prayer for their brother, but someone was up in the Seawell house all night.

CHAPTER XII

THE OLD BURYING GROUND

When Francis started for the Seawells' he wanted to overtake his brothers and sisters as soon as they reached the wharf, so he hurried as fast as his legs would carry him and got over the ground at a good swift pace. He arrived at the turn into the winding road and as the rest of the trip was up-hill he was forced to go more slowly but he went straight ahead, without dawdling. The way was narrow, and wide enough for two cars to pass in only a few spots. He had just reached a curve when a short distance ahead he saw a closed car in which two men were seated. They seemed to be waiting for someone, then suddenly one of them noticed him and spoke to his companion. They started slowly forward and as the car and the boy drew nearer, the man in the back opened the door as if to alight. Francis did not hesitate, but stepped to one side to let them pass and the man at the wheel asked:

"Say, Buddy, does this lead to the main street?"

"Yes, sir. Follow it straight down and turn to the left if you want to go to the village."

Francis pointed in the direction he had come. While his head was turned away from the men, one of them seized him firmly and lifted him into the back of the car and wrapped a heavy coat tightly around him.

The boy struggled desperately and tried to yell, but he was held in a firm grip with the man's hand over his mouth and the car plunged forward at a terrific rate. In a few moments Francis grew weak from the heat, and the hand that kept him from calling out was close to his nostrils almost cutting off his breath. He relaxed and his head fell back so the hand was loosened somewhat and the dizziness that was beginning to swim through his brain disappeared slowly as his lungs filled. The little fellow had sense enough left to realize that he would be more comfortable if he did not struggle. Perhaps, if the men thought he was smothering, they would give him plenty of air, so he let his body go limp, and the heavy covering was removed a bit from his nose. The car continued at a reckless speed, but Francis could not catch a glimpse through the windows to give him an idea of the direction they were taking. He could tell they were racing over a rough, winding route because of the continuous bumping. Once the man in the back called out:

" Have a care or you will dump the thing."

The driver paid no attention to the warning

and the two in the back were tossed about like a pair of balls. His companion did not let go his hold on the coat but kept the small prisoner bundled so he could not move his legs or arms, and Francis did not try to release himself. After what seemed ages, the car suddenly stopped, the doors were banged open, and the boy was lifted out like a sack, face down, with his head well covered. The men carried him through some thick foliage—he could feel the boughs as they brushed through—then they lifted him over something, and ran with him down an incline. Neither of them spoke except for an occasional oath as one of them slipped, and at last they stopped. He could hear them fumbling with something that sounded like a chain, and in another instant, he was dropped unceremoniously on an uneven floor and rolled over. The coat was taken off, and Francis pretended not to be conscious. One of the men hastily felt of his heart.

"Is he all right?" the other asked anxiously.

"Sure. He'll come to after a spell. We'll take this thing to the chief as proof that we have him." They removed Lawrence Nelson's camera and speedily bound Francis's hands and feet together.

"Didn't expect to make such a quick getaway," the first man said in a tone of relief.

"No. He must have gone out early this

morning before we got on the job. That's why we didn't catch sight of him before," the other answered.

Francis wondered what they meant, then suddenly he thought that because of the camera, the men must have taken him for Lawrence Nelson. For a moment he was tempted to tell them their mistake, but then he thought they would not believe him and he decided to wait. Finally, when he was secured, one said:

"Now get away with the car and telephone the Seawells, then get to the chief and find out what he wants next. Hurry up. I ain't stuck on being parked in a burying ground for hours."

Francis was all ears. Perhaps they had brought him to the very place the Half Dozen had visited that morning and he wasn't far from his friends. Cautiously he wriggled his hands; and he wished that his knife was in his back pocket, but it wasn't, and the bands around his wrists held them tight. He lay still, heard one chap go out and in a few moments heard the car go tearing along the road. The man in charge of him ran his fingers over the bands and being satisfied that they were fast, he went outside to wait. Slowly the boy opened his eyes and although the place was pretty dark, he was sure it was the old tool house and he began to wonder how he could get away. Again he wriggled his hands and squirmed his body but his bonds did

not give and the effort to free himself only made him ache all over. The place was absolutely quiet, time passed drearily, his throat became hot with thirst, and he grew more and more hungry. After what seemed to him hours, the man came in.

"Here is something to eat, kid. Now don't try any funny business or I'll tie you up again and you can go hungry," he warned.

When he loosened his hands, the man helped Francis sit up, and by the dim light from the partly opened door, he saw a bottle of milk and a package on the floor. Roughly the fellow took off the cover and held the bottle to the boy's lips. Oh, it tasted good and he took a long drink.

"Now, I guess with that as a bracer, you can manage the rest," he said, and opening the package he took out a sandwich, which he handed to Francis. "Help yourself," he invited and went back to the door while the boy devoured the food. There were two huge sandwiches, with thick roast beef between, and three home-made crullers. Never did a meal taste better. When it was finished, the man came back, tied his prisoner again, but was careful to leave him in a more comfortable position than the first time.

"You'll be out of this soon now, but while I'm here, I'm not taking chances," he said gruffly as he slipped out.

With a full stomach, Francis felt considerably

better, so he prepared to make the best of things. He could hear the birds chirping in the trees and the occasional buzz of a bee. It was all very quiet, and before Francis knew it, he dozed, then went sound asleep. How much time elapsed he had no idea, but he heard subdued voices by the tool house and the next instant the men came in, carried the boy out, put him into a car, and drove away. His heart sank for he feared they would take him a long way, and what would the Maxes think had happened to him! He had once heard of a boy being kidnapped and never recovered by his family, and the thought brought tears that were hard to fight back. He was not so covered that he could not see a little, but the only thing he could be sure of was that it was still daylight. The car followed a rocky, winding road and a part of the way Francis thought they must be crossing fields. There were three men in the car with him now, but finally they stopped and he was carried into a house and left on a couch in a back room. One of the men began to prepare food. They cooked coffee, eggs and bacon, and after a while one came in with a share for the prisoner. His hands were untied again and he was allowed to eat. The portion they brought him was generous and over their coffee the three talked in low tones.

"I don't like this business," one of them muttered angrily.

"Well, it ain't my idee of a decent way to make a living. We gotta keep this kid for weeks before we get a cent out of it, and we run a consarned big chance of getting twenty years for it," another complained.

"Don't see what the heck Sam wanted to do it for anyway. Stealing kids ain't in my line," the third added.

"Suppose we might as well get all we kin while we're about it en have a regular sized pile. When we clean up I'm going to get out of this game. Them revenues is gettin' thick as bees on a honey flower en detectives is gettin' so dog-gone clever yah can't be sure a' nothin'," one added.

They scowled over their food and after an hour had passed, which they spent smoking and discussing the uncertainty of the game, one of them stopped to listen.

"Here comes Sam," he said.

A few minutes more, and a car drew up before the house. Francis could hear the door open and close and the man came briskly into the room. He wore a long coat, goggles, and his hat pulled over his eyes.

"Well, every little thing's going great. You trot along to the wharf, Walker, or they'll be looking for you," he said cheerfully and one of the men went out.

"Want something to eat?"

"No, ate before I came up."

"Say, Johnson," one of the men started to speak, but hesitated.

"Say what?" Johnson asked sharply.

"We ain't none of us so keen on this thing," the man added.

"You'll be keen enough when we come to divvy up, I guess," Johnson answered with a sneer.

"Dunno's I will, at that," the chap answered defiantly.

"Well, let's not quibble; we're in it now. I want a look at the kid. Where is he?" Johnson demanded.

A quick step across the floor and Johnson came into the room. Francis was curled up on the couch, and Johnson, throwing off the covering, turned the boy's face to the light. The instant he saw the little fellow, he swore a string of oaths, and pushed the boy from him.

"Where in the name of everything did you pick this up, Bill?" he demanded.

"We told you and we gave you his camera. What's the matter?"

"Aw, nothing. You got the wrong boy!" Johnson swore.

"Where's the right one?" Bill demanded.

"He's probably guarded by the army, you fools," Johnson declared furious with rage.

"Come on, no hard names. You told us to

pick up the boy as he came along the road, and this one came along with his name in front of him," Bill defended angrily. "It's your own fault; why didn't you come with us?"

Johnson began to pace up and down biting his lips and fingers.

"We might's well let this kid go," one of the men ventured.

"Like the devil we will, Simpson," Johnson exclaimed angrily. "And have him blow off his mouth to the whole country."

From the foot of the couch, Francis could see pretty much what was going on. After a few minutes of awkward silence, the chap they called Bill picked up an empty basin and went out, leaving the door open. They could hear him pumping, and the water splashed as if he was washing his face and hands, but after a while the sounds ceased. But Bill did not return although the other two did not seem to notice his absence.

"We gotta get rid of this kid, that's all there is to that," Johnson declared still tramping heavily up and down.

"We kin ship him off to Canada or Alaska," Simpson suggested as he lighted an oil lamp and carefully adjusted the metal shade so it would not be seen through the windows.

"That'd cost too much, besides taking a man to look after him. We're short-handed now with those two chaps laid up," Johnson reminded him.

During their talk Francis had managed slowly to untie the bands that held his ankles, but it was a tedious process, because he had to do it with his knees doubled up. He knew that an unguarded move on his part would attract the notice of the men, and Simpson might remember that his hands had been left loose.

"He could be put into one of the trucks and passed along. The drivers would see that he didn't stop this side of the line and considerable past it," Simpson argued.

"No, it won't do; we got to get rid of this kid, and we gotta do it quick, see?" Johnson insisted.

"Naw, I don't," Simpson answered stubbornly.

"Well, I do," Johnson flared back and strode swiftly toward the door to Francis's room, but Simpson sprang in front of him.

"I draw the line at murder," he declared quietly.

"I'm doing the job. Get out of the way."

"Maybe you're doin' it, Johnson, but I ain't a party to it, see," Simpson answered, holding his grounds.

Quick as a flash Johnson struck out with his fist, but Simpson was prepared for him. They clinched and struck right and left. In a few seconds they went down and rolled about the floor. First one was up and then the other. They fought furiously, tumbling the furniture

and ripping their clothes. Francis watched breathlessly, then suddenly he realized that the outside door was open. If he could get past them as they struggled in each other's arms, he would be free. The one small lamp was on a shelf in the far corner of the room and threw only a feeble light. The boy watched his chance, then slipped into the room, ducked behind a chair, and after a second's anxious watching, he crept on all fours past an old box that had been used for a seat. He was half-way across and safe, when the men began to roll in his direction. The little fellow bit his lips and clenched his fists. He wished he could help Simpson, but he couldn't.

Again the fighters rolled back toward the opposite wall. Johnson was underneath, clinging to his opponent, and Simpson's attention was taken up with the man he was pummeling. This was a chance, and like a cat, Francis leaped toward the door and through it into the darkness outside. He could not tell where he was headed, but he ran as hard as he could go away from the house. Evidently his escape was not discovered, for he could hear the men still fighting, so he made good his advantage, and ran on through brush, over logs, down hills and up. At last he was forced to stop for breath and sat on a great rock listening. Although he kept perfectly still for a long time not a sound of pursuers reached him, and gradually he was able to draw deep

breaths of relief. He rested quietly for a while longer, and not even the breaking of a branch disturbed the night's silence. Francis had read that people lost in a woods were likely to wander in a circle, so he made up his mind to stay where he was until he could see what was about him and where he was going. He did not want to get further away from his friends if he could help it, nor did he want to find himself back at the house, so feeling about the ground, he selected a place that seemed sheltered, and lay down. There was no moon, but the sky was full of stars, and he watched their friendly blinking. In camp, the boys had often gone on long hikes and slept in the open, but there were always other boys and a leader with them and being all alone wasn't very pleasant. Besides there was the dread that Johnson or some of them would be looking for him.

The little fellow's heart beat furiously and his throat ached in his anxiety. After a time he felt quieter, and finally he fell asleep, a fine, sound sleep in which the hours fled quietly by and when he opened his eyes the stars were gone, except one lovely one that seemed to have waited to cheer him, and there was a soft grey light in the skies. Instantly he recalled what had happened and lifting his head cautiously he peeped about him. He had been sleeping in a hollow of the woods, and on all sides of him was thick foliage

and tall trees, cedars and maples whose leafy boughs were spread protectingly over him. There was no sign of anyone following him but he listened to be sure he was safe before he ventured to move. At last, feeling assured that he had escaped the men, he climbed to the top of the hill and looked around. There wasn't a house in sight, but when he moved forward a little distance, he was sure he heard the sound of water splashing on the beach. Stooping almost double, and glancing back every few steps, he crept toward the noise and in about twenty minutes he stood in a thick grove that overlooked Long Island Sound. He was sure it was the Sound by the rocky beach, and his heart jumped joyously.

Francis remembered the time he and Maxwell had missed their way in the woods, and his brother had reasoned that the best way to get out was to go straight across. He dreaded going back lest he meet some of the gang, but he thought if he hurried he might get through before they started a daylight search for him.

"Our Father which art in heaven, deliver me from evil," he whispered softly with his face turned to the sky, then clenching his fists, he started swiftly but cautiously into the woods.

He skirted the hollow where he had spent the night, and after traveling several minutes, he came upon a great clump of ripe wineberries.

Quickly gathering some, he ate them and went on. The wood was full of birds chirping noisily as they were awakened by the new day. In the distance he heard a dog bark and a few minutes later a rooster crowed vigorously. It was pleasant to hear, because it meant that people were not far away. He picked another handful of berries, luscious red ones that tasted fine. Once he heard an auto race past at his left so he waited until the clatter of it died away in the distance. At last he came to a wire fence along the edge of the woods, a corn field just beyond. He climbed some rocks and looked off over the country. The sun was just beginning to send long golden rays through the sky. The boy could see several farmhouses, the smoke lazily coiling from their kitchen chimneys and after a patient search he was able to pick out the bell tower on the white firehouse. He knew that was to the left of the monument. Jumping down from his observation post, he started forward along the fence, deciding not to go to the road for a while at least. He kept a sharp lookout in every direction, but no one was in sight, and he began to walk more rapidly. He reached the end of the farmer's fence, but still kept well among the trees, following the general direction of the main road.

Francis believed that when he did not return the day before, his brother would look for him at

the Seawells', and as that was the only house in which he was known, he wanted to reach it, feeling sure that Mrs. Seawell and Larry would help him get back to the Half Dozen. He felt dreadfully lonely for his brothers and sisters and could think of nothing but finding them as quickly as possible. If he didn't, they might wire to Dad and worry Mother. With this thought in mind, he began to run, and his feet carried him swiftly over the ground, but never for a moment did he forget to be on the alert against recapture. If Johnson found him, he would surely kill him this time. Suddenly through the trees, Francis caught sight of a house. He could see only the upper part, but it was painted a dark red, so he headed for it, but as he neared the place he slackened his pace. In a little while he was close enough to be sure he had found the right place. He slipped along, close to the ground, following a tall hedge, and when he heard a sound, he stepped in among the close branches and waited to see what it was. Finally he was convinced that whatever it might be, it was too far away for him to fear, and he went on until at last the hedge led him right under the kitchen windows of the Seawell home.

The boy's heart bumped with gladness when he suddenly spied Katie's head as she moved past the window. "Katie, Katie," he called softly.

Instantly Katie's face peeped down at him, and with a "Glory be to the Lord" she disappeared, only to reappear a moment later as she ran around the house to meet him.

"You keep yourself nice and quiet and we'll slip in without attracting any attention," she whispered and walking close to the wall, in another minute Francis was safe in the kitchen, and Katie beat softly on a bell.

The bell was evidently some kind of signal, for in a minute Mrs. Seawell stepped into the room, having jumped out of bed to answer Katie, only stopping long enough to throw on a soft clinging negligée and step into slippers.

"What is —— Why, you dear boy!" she whispered. "Where did he come from?"

"I came down early because I couldn't sleep just thinking about him. I heard someone call and when I looked, there he was among the high geranium hedges," she answered triumphantly.

"Oh, Katie! That's fine! Now don't say anything about it. I'm going to wake my husband. You come in with me, dear, and keep away from the windows. Fix him something to eat and bring it into my room, Katie, please." Mrs. Seawell led Francis into her own room. "You look tired, dear, you want a nice warm bath, then you can have breakfast."

Francis readily agreed to the bath and was soon splashing around in a big tub, thoroughly

enjoying himself. Mrs. Seawell helped him with the soft towels and found one of Herbert's outgrown robes and a pair of slippers. When they went back into her room, Mr. Seawell was there.

"Good-morning, old chap. Feel able to tell us where you have been?" he said softly.

"Good-morning, sir. I'm all right. I—I'd like to know about the others. D-did they send word to—to D-Dad?" Francis asked.

"Your brothers and sisters are all here and they didn't send word to Dad," Mrs. Seawell assured him, exchanging an amused glance with her husband who frowned a very ferocious frown, but it didn't deceive Francis one bit.

"If I were your Dad, I should give you all a good spanking," Mr. Seawell declared.

"Perhaps Dad will," Francis answered with a cheerful grin.

Just then Katie appeared with a tray which she placed on Mrs. Seawell's dressing table, and, between mouthfuls, Francis told the Seawells of his experience since leaving the Half Dozen to return Larry's camera. They listened until he had finished, then Mr. Seawell asked a few questions, which Francis answered as best he could. They had him describe the place where he slept, the neighborhood where he saw the Sound, and the woods through which he passed that morning, exactly what he saw when he stood on the rock to get his bearings and find his way to their

house. When it was finished, Mr. Seawell frowned.

"On second thought, young gentleman, I do not know that I should spank you," he said.

"Neither will Dad but he'll love us all a lot and so will Mother," Francis laughed heartily at the prospect.

"I think I shall telephone Pellman, who by the way is your friend Philip Pell, Francis, and ask him to come up here. In the meantime, Fellas, you might let the incomplete Half Dozen know that their number is now intact, but I should have them avoid a demonstration, at least until Phil gets here. I should not be surprised if this chap could grab off a few winks of sleep. You can tuck him in my bed if you want to," Mr. Seawell said.

"I'll tuck him right in here," his wife answered and soon Francis was comfortably tucked and Mr. Seawell was right, the boy did "grab off" several winks of sleep, to his own great surprise. He waked up about an hour later, feeling so content he could hardly believe the whole affair wasn't a dream. In a moment Mrs. Seawell opened the door softly and discovered the lad awake.

"The family is waiting to see you," she whispered.

Francis sat up. "May they come in?"

In they trooped, all five of them, also Bargulus

and Osric. "Hello, old chap, glad to see you," Maxwell said stiffly as befitted a man, and Francis answered in the same fashion.

"Hello yourselves, glad to see you."

But dignity and reserve had no place in such a reunion and in a minute Francis was being clasped, first in one pair of arms, then another, and hugged, kissed, laughed and cried over all at once. He bore it happily, laughed and cried a little himself, and Bargulus insisted in having a full share in the business. He jumped and wriggled his small body through everybody's legs and finally, unable to restrain himself longer, jumped on to the bed and wormed his way in between Carrol and her brother who were indulging in a heart-satisfying embrace. Then they had to give way to him and pet him and tell him he was a great fellow, which by the way he knew very well. Only Osric maintained his calm reserve but even he curled himself in the small boy's lap and favored the party with a purred composition of his own, quite musical and pleasing.

At last Mrs. Seawell reminded the little folk that Mr. Pellman was waiting to see Francis, so he dressed quickly, with ten extra hands to facilitate matters, and soon they were assembled in the living-room.

"Good-morning, old chap, glad to see you," the man said heartily. "Mr. Seawell has told me

your story while you were asleep and later, when you are rested, I'd like to hear it from you." As he talked he drew Francis close to his knee. "Feel equal to seeing someone?" he asked. "Someone you may have seen last night?"

Francis came close in his arms. "Yes," he said quietly.

"Dan, come in, please," Mr. Pellman called and Dan came in with two other men who were handcuffed. Francis shrank when he saw them. "Don't be afraid, it's all right, now, old chap," Pellman whispered. Then, speaking a little louder he said, "Francis, do you know these men?"

Francis nodded his head. "I saw them last night," he answered.

"Do you know who they were, or what they were called?" Pellman asked.

"That's Bill, and the other man is Simpson," the boy told them while the two men looked sullenly at him.

"I guess that will be enough, Dan," Pellman said and a sudden wave of pity swept over the boy in his arms.

"Simpson didn't let Johnson hurt me, Mr. Pellman," he pleaded.

"Wait a minute, Dan," Pellman requested. "I didn't intend to tell you, Francis, but our men who were looking for you last night found the house and two men in it, Johnson and Simp-

son. Johnson was dead. Simpson claims that Johnson started the fight."

"He did, Mr. Pellman, truly. Johnson wanted to kill me to get rid of me and Simpson didn't let him. Simpson stood in the door and Johnson came at him like a wildcat and hit him an awful crack and then they began to fight and I got away because Simpson hadn't tied my hands again. I wish you wouldn't hurt him. He tried to help me," the boy pleaded.

"Then really Simpson was not only fighting in his own defense but in yours as well! If I write this out as you have told us, will you swear to it before God that it is absolutely true?" Pellman asked gently.

Francis smiled. "God knows all about its being true, but I'll tell Him if you want me to," he answered earnestly and the detective hugged the small boy to his heart. There were whopping big tears in Mrs. Seawell's eyes, and Mr. Seawell frowned as if he would draw his forehead down over his face and blew his nose much louder than really polite people do. Dan was looking out of the window, Simpson stood on first one foot then the other. Finally he said, chokily:

"Thanks, kid!"

Francis ran to him and took his manacled hand. "You gave me a big supper and you didn't tie my hands, and you did fight for me,

and I must thank you. Mother and Dad and all of us thank you," he said hurriedly.

"That's all right, kid. None of us was keen on that kidnappin' business nohow and didn't mean you no harm," Simpson said earnestly.

CHAPTER XIII

POLICE REPORTS

When the men were taken away, Pellman and Francis went to a quiet corner of the porch, and Pellman said:

"If you feel equal to doing it now, I wish you'd tell me exactly what happened, everything you can remember. You can do it later if you would rather, but if you do it now, it will be over and out of the way for good."

"I'll tell you now," Francis agreed, so Dan joined them and taking a pad and pencil from his pocket, he sat a little back of the two and took the statement down in shorthand.

Francis told the story from beginning to end, just as he had to Mr. and Mrs. Seawell and when it was finished, Pellman asked a great many questions, about how many men he saw, what they all looked like, and what they said. When Francis had answered the last one, he asked:

"Why did they take me? Did they think I was Larry?"

"Yes. You see, Johnson was Mr. Nelson's chauffeur last year and was dismissed for incom-

petence. When he found out that Lawrence was here he planned to be revenged by kidnapping him and he bullied some of the gang into helping him. The men did not know Larry, and when you came up the road they made the mistake. They were misled by the name on the camera for one thing and, as they were not very anxious to do the job, they were not as careful as they otherwise would have been. If they had stopped to think they would have realized that you are smaller than a boy of thirteen is, and they might have tried to find out who you were and perhaps make your father pay them a ransom for you. If Simpson's record is not too bad, he'll get out of the business easily, and the others, too, perhaps, because nothing really happened either to you or to Lawrence," Pellman explained.

"I'm glad," Francis answered.

"Another thing, old chap. Tell me what your housekeeper looked like. I have the police in New York trying to locate her, and they need a description."

Francis told all he could about Jane, while Dan made more notes, but none of the Half Dozen could tell what Jane wore when she disappeared so mysteriously, although they all could remember various clothes she owned and what she might have had on that day.

All this took up about half the morning and when Pellman started to leave, Mrs. Seawell

asked: "Won't you come back for lunch, Mr. Pellman? We shall be happy to have you."

Pellman looked at his watch. "If your lunch hour is not too early, I shall be glad to accept your invitation. I have a few things to attend to now, but they will not take long."

"How about one o'clock?"

"Thank you. That will be splendid. In case I am detained, I shall telephone to you."

"Good! We shall see you at one, I hope," she smiled, and the Federal Service man took his leave.

"I think a swim will do us good," Mrs. Seawell remarked.

So did everybody and soon the entire family were splashing about in the clear waters of the Sound, laughing and shouting as the waves broke over them. Then they played on the beach with some huge balls that would sail off into the waves that tossed them about and every once in a while there was a wild scramble to capture them.

"It is now twelve-thirty, just time enough to get into clothes," Mr. Seawell declared, and they ran back to the house to dress.

Promptly at one o'clock, Pellman returned in his car and as his face wore a very cheerful expression, everybody was sure his business had been successfully accomplished. They sat down to one of Katie's wonderful meals. It seemed as if she never would stop bringing in dishes piled

with good things, until Mr. Seawell frowned at her as if he was greatly displeased, but Katie smiled when he said very crossly to his wife:

"I wish, Fellas, that when we have guests for lunch you would see that Katie prepares a variety of dishes, and has plenty of everything. Haven't you anything else to eat, Katie?"

"Yes, sir," Katie told him. "There's more chicken, and some cold duck, and I cooked a tongue this morning, and I've got some beets and corn and some ——"

Mr. Seawell threw up his hands. "I surrender. Help, help," he cried. The youngsters laughed heartily at his comical expression, and Katie went off with an amused chuckle.

"No wonder Nell says that you will never grow up," Mrs. Seawell smiled.

"By the way, I thought Nell was here," Mr. Seawell said.

"She was, but she wanted to visit some friends in New York and they kept her. She will be back to-day," his wife told him.

Maxine looked up at Mrs. Seawell. "Now that we are all right, I think we could go back to the Island."

"I think Dad would want us to. We are quite a crowd," Maxwell added.

"There is plenty of room for you here, my dears, so don't worry," Mrs. Seawell told them quickly.

"Wouldn't we be all right on the Island?" Francis asked Mr. Pellman.

"I think you would. You see, Mrs. Seawell, Simpson softened up a great deal after his talk with Francis, and he gave me all the information I want. He says the gang is waiting for some of the leaders, who are expected next week. The men have been afraid of Black Eagle Island for some time, and most of them refuse to go back there since the jewels were taken. Some of them suspect the place is under close observation and some of them have been killed in the search for the box. I have my man, Peter, there to keep watch and I really think the children will be quite safe. The gang do not know what has happened to Simpson, Johnson and Bill because I have them in a private lock-up for the present, and when the leaders do come down, I am of the opinion that the round-up will take place in Orient. If the Half Dozen could get a good person who can cook and look after their physical needs, they will get along nicely."

Mrs. Seawell looked doubtful, then she smiled. "I could send Hamilton over. He has been in the Nelson family since he was born, and his father before him. In fact, he has looked after the Nelson children all their lives."

"Yes, and he can cook, clean, sail a boat, drive a car, make a garden or do anything. He's a great pal," Lawrence told them enthusiastically.

"Father and Mother always trust him with us, or with money or the house. Father says he has more sense and is more trustworthy than a great many white people."

"Well, perhaps with Hamilton, if he will go, and your man Peter they would be all right," Mrs. Seawell conceded.

"We can have somebody take a look at them every day," Mr. Seawell declared. "We will miss you, Half Dozen, but perhaps your father would want you to stay put, especially when you are all right."

So it was settled they were to go back. They liked the Seawells immensely, but the Half Dozen were beginning to miss the Island and gleefully prepared to return to it. Of course Hamilton would go with them and as soon as he was ready, they piled into two of the cars, thanked their good host and hostess for their kindness and said good-bye.

"We shall see you often," Mr. Seawell reminded them.

At the wharf the *Jr. Black Eagle* awaited them and, piling in, with Hamilton in charge, they waved more good-byes to Lawrence, Herbert and Lincoln, who had ridden down to see them off.

Away the little boat went and how the Half Dozen cheered when they saw the Island rise up to meet them.

Joyfully they raced up to the house and around the garden and found everything just as they had left it, except the bird baths which needed replenishing. A robin perched on a near-by bough chirped his thanks when Nancy and Francis appeared with a pail of water. Two robins and a catbird hardly waited until the children withdrew but promptly flew down and hopped in to have a shower.

Hamilton took hold of things quite as if he were accustomed to doing it and in a little while he was busy fussing around the kitchen in a big white apron that covered him from neck almost to his toes. They found Bess grazing contentedly, for Peter had milked her twice and tied her among some nice fresh grass. Even the chickens had been fed.

The Half Dozen put on fresh clothes and prepared to enjoy themselves. The Maxes, relieved of most of their cares, played happily with the little ones on the beach and finally, growing tired of romping, Carrol went to watch their new housekeeper. Hamilton had been doing a bit of cleaning and the house was taking on a polished look that was very becoming to the fine old place. Carrol watched him without interrupting and occasionally he glanced at her out of the corner of his eye.

"You are making things look nice," she told him.

" Nice things is easy to clean up. Dey's like quality folks en feel better when dey's clean," he told her. " Now, dat's 'nough for now, en dis chile's going to do some bakin'."

Off he went to the kitchen with the small girl at his heels and, after a search through the cupboards, he found what he wanted, then began to stir it in a big white bowl. He lighted the oil heater and when the oven was ready to receive it, in went the cake. " Now we-all jes' keep our 'tention on dat cake en pretty soon she be right to take out."

Carrol was leaning against the table. She was tired but she thought no one would know it. However, Hamilton was very observing so he poured her out a glass of milk and, handing it to her, remarked quietly:

" Dis will spruce you up fine. I 'specks you want to sit you down en res' quicker'n you' brothers en sisters."

" Yes, I do," Carrol admitted a little sadly for she did wish that she could play as long as the others did.

Hamilton went on working and after a bit he said:

" Now, den, you jes' go tell de family dat eatin' time's in fifteen minutes, 'xactly," he chuckled.

Carrol ran down the path to tell them, and her news was received with clamors of delight. They

lingered to do a little war dance about the small messenger, then hoisting her to their shoulders, the Maxes led the way to the house where they barely had time to brush up for the feast.

It was a feast. Hamilton proved his powers as a cook, and changing his apron he served them with a great deal of dignity, with the addition of a wide smile that showed his white teeth. The cake was wonderful and no one refused a second helping. Last, but not least, Hamilton went out to milk, and Bess seemed glad to have him. For a while the Half Dozen played games on the lawn, then the youngest ones were put to bed, and the Maxes came downstairs to listen to the radio. Hamilton joined them and enjoyed the music.

Later, Maxwell was tuning around for something they would like, when suddenly they caught a voice and he stopped to hear what it was all about.

"Police reports," came to their ears.

"Oh, let's listen for a minute. I never heard them," Maxine asked.

"Report of missing persons," the officer said very slowly and distinctly, and then he began a list of persons whose families wanted to locate them. "Johnny Smith, age ten. Wore straw hat with blue band, white shirt and blue serge knickers. Tan shoes and stockings. Last seen near playground," the man reported.

"Isn't that great?" Maxwell declared. "When children get lost it doesn't take long to find them."

The officer was announcing again. "Report from Bellevue Hospital. June 26, woman picked up at Thirty-third Street and Broadway, having been knocked over by an auto and suffering from injuries about the head. Unable to give particulars about herself and still suffering a loss of memory. Age about fifty-five. Tall, blue eyes, grey hair, dark brown in back. Wore one piece blue dress with white collar and cuffs, small black hat, black gloves, shoes and stockings. Carried a good-sized black hand-bag containing personal belongings for over night use. Anyone recognizing the description notify New York City Police Headquarters, or Bellevue Hospital, or call and identify the patient."

Before the man finished the Maxes were listening with breathless interest. "It's Jane," they shouted together.

"Jinks! Shall we write to the Police Department?" Maxwell cried.

"We better and get the letter off to-morrow, special delivery," Maxine answered.

"It would be quicker to telephone but we can't do that until to-morrow and we might have trouble making them understand. Let's write now."

Paper and pen were brought out and the chil-

dren wrote carefully that they thought the description fitted Jane Menkler, who had failed to join them at Black Eagle Island, and would have gone to the Pennsylvania Station near Thirty-third Street and Broadway. They added that someone would come as soon as possible to see the woman in Bellevue Hospital.

"Mr. Pellman said he would have someone look her up. We'll tell him or Peter, whoever we see first," Maxwell declared.

"Poor Jane. If we had just known enough we could have notified the police when she didn't come," Maxine said regretfully.

"I hope she gets better," Maxwell added.

Hamilton had listened and he nodded his head.

"Like's not she's going to get all right when she sees one of you," he declared cheerfully.

The next morning Maxwell sailed to Orient to mail the letter and found a good supply of mail for the Half Dozen. He hustled home with it, and of course they opened Dad's letter first of all. He told them Mother was nearly ready to come home. "Just about two or three weeks, and she will be fit as a fiddle. Before I forget it, Mother wonders why you never speak of Jane when you write to us. How does she take to Black Eagle Island and housekeeping in an ancient manor? I expect she is giving you lots of good things to eat and takes an occasional

tramp and sail with you. Don't let anyone run off with our good cook. That would be a catastrophe."

The Half Dozen looked at each other solemnly but before they could say much about it, Philip Pellman appeared, sketch-book and all.

"Just sailing past and dropped in," he laughed.

"You are the very man we want to see," Maxwell declared.

"Wishing for angels you hear the flutter of their sails," Pellman laughed. "What's up?"

They told him about the police report and their letter to headquarters, also they told him about Dad's letter.

"Mother wonders why we never write about Jane," Maxine said ruefully.

"Mothers have an uncanny way of reading between the lines," Pellman remarked, "and I have been of the opinion yours would do something of the kind before long. How is she?"

"Getting along just great! Only two or three weeks more, Dad says, and she can go home," Maxwell answered happily.

"That's good news. I'll move things along for you and get a man to see Jane to-morrow sure. If someone calls her by name she may remember it," he said.

"If she remembers that much, will she be all right then?" Francis wanted to know.

"You can't tell, but probably things will come back to her quickly when her brain gets started on the right track. Anything else?"

"No, thank you. We are doing nicely and Hamilton takes good care of us," they assured him.

"I believe you. Peter's still on the Island. Don't forget to hang out the white flag in an emergency. I must trot along. See you again soon. Good-bye!"

"Guess we would better write a letter to Dad and mark it personal, then he can tell Mother what he wants to," Maxine said softly and the others agreed that was the best thing to do. So they wrote:

"DEAR DAD:

We are all glad as can be about Mother and we didn't say anything about Jane because she didn't come and we didn't hear anything from her. We had a consultation and decided to carry on by ourselves and not worry Mother. We've all camped, Dad, and know how, and we have been very well. Now we have a nice colored man, who has been in the Nelson family since he was born. He's been staying at the Seawells', and so is Lawrence Nelson; he did not go to Europe with his folks. To-night we heard the police reports over the radio and the officer said a woman, who sounds like Jane, was hurt and is in Bellevue Hospital because she lost her memory. Mr. Philip Pellman, another friend

of the Nelsons' and Seawells' is going to have her looked up for us to-morrow and we wrote a letter to the Police Department in New York and told them we think it is Jane. Hamilton, that's the colored man, is fine. He cleans, cooks, knows boats, autos, and most everything, so you see we are pretty well off and Mr. Pellman told Mrs. Seawell that he is sure we are all right here and he wants to meet you and Mother sometime. He's been awfully nice and so has everybody and we hope you can fix things so Mother isn't worried about us.

There is lots to tell you when we see you, Dad. Guess we should have written about Jane when she didn't come.

Barrels of love to you both from
YOUR HALF DOZEN."

"There, I guess that explains everything. No use trying to write about the bootleggers or Francis. It will be better to tell them about that because things you write sometimes sound worse than they are." Maxwell sighed with relief that the task was at last accomplished and, after a careful rereading, the envelope was sealed.

The next morning Hamilton spied a trawler on its way to Greenport and as he knew the owner of the boat he managed to hail her. When she was close enough, he called:

"You-all take a impo'tant letta' to Greenport?"

"Sure. Can you fetch it?" the man answered cheerfully.

Hamilton had gotten out one of the rowboats so, hopping into that, the letter was soon on its way to Greenport, where it would go out earlier than if they waited to send it from Orient.

CHAPTER XIV

A GOOD JOB FINISHED

More than half a week passed in which the Half Dozen had a gorgeous playtime because Hamilton did not leave any work for any of them and under his care things went along as smoothly as a well oiled machine. The Maxes had become interested in the great variety of birds that visited the Island and already had quite a list. In order that it might be as complete as possible, they waked up one morning before four o'clock, dressed in knickers, had a bite of breakfast by themselves in the kitchen and, armed with a field-glass, they set out to explore and discover how many more feathered friends they could find to add to their catalogue.

"Hamilton is going to sail over to Orient before breakfast to get some things he wants, but we'll be back before the children get up, I guess," Maxine said as they closed the door softly after them.

"We'd better plan to be here before six o'clock. That will give us a good hour and a half, and we can do it again if we do not have enough time to-day," Maxwell said looking at his watch.

They started at a brisk pace, past the barn and through the woods where they were soon absorbed in the delightful discoveries they made and were amazed at the number of birds they found at that early hour. The little things were beginning to stir about and seemed quite confident that they had the world to themselves. The Maxes came upon several species they had never seen before and while Maxine made notes her brother described their size and markings, to be compared with the bird books when they returned home. The two had spent about half an hour over the task and without especially meaning to go in that direction they drew near the old boat-house. Of course they were being as quiet as a pair of kittens, stepping softly, speaking in whispers, and moving with greatest care lest they alarm the wee things upon whom they wanted to call. In fact they behaved so well that the birds did not mind them at all but continued with their tasks, with only an occasional inquisitive glance from a bright, bead-like eye. They were most admirable hosts and hostesses and to the children's great delight, they were let into a number of charming family secrets.

Suddenly, through the stillness, Maxwell thought he heard a noise that was no part of bird housekeeping, so he held up a warning finger to his twin and they stood motionless, listening. In a moment they heard plainly the sound of a boat

and, without hesitation, they crept forward to the point where the Half Dozen had hidden when Maxwell raided the boat-house. A slim, sixteen-foot motor-boat was drawn out of the water, a sail hovered near the shore, and two rowboats were just landing.

The Maxes dropped on all fours to watch what happened. They counted fifteen men, several of whom were very well dressed and might have been the owners of private yachts. They seemed to have their jobs prearranged for they divided into groups; some visited the concrete cave, others went into the boat-house, while still others took stations overlooking the Sound, where they were on guard. They all moved swiftly, but very quietly, and anyone who did not know they were there might easily have passed without noticing them. For several minutes they examined the place thoroughly, then all except the guards went inside the house which must have been pretty crowded with so many behind its closed door. After a time they became less cautious and the Maxes could hear their voices, raised angrily. Not loud at first, but as they grew more furious they shouted and occasionally a word or two drifted up to the hill. Finally the door burst open and a man screamed:

" I don't care what you say, I know those kids from the house were in here. They were in the woods that morning, and I'm sure they came in

here. Do you suppose they would give this place the go-by when they were rubber-necking into everything?" he demanded.

"Well, we searched the house from roof to cellar twice and there wasn't a sign of anything. If they'd found the box they never would have stayed here and we watched every move they made," another flared back.

Then one of the better dressed men spoke up quietly. "I understand these children are alone on the Island. Very well, we will pay them a visit right now, and if they found those jewels, we know several excellent and effective methods by which they can be made to talk!"

"Bring in the boats," one of the leaders ordered.

"I say, chief, of course you are running this show, but Johnson, Bill and Simpson got messed up with those kids somehow, we ain't none of us clear about it, and we ain't clapped an eye on any of the three since. I don't believe those kids are as unprotected as they look," he said.

"'Fraid?" the man asked with a sneer.

"Will you let a bunch of kids get away with a year's haul? There's a fortune for all of us in that box and none of us has had a cent except from one stone. The chief's right, we've got to make those kids talk and we've got to do it quick. Orient and Greenport's getting thick with chaps that don't look good to me and the

quicker I can get away, the better I'll feel. Let's go!" he said, stepping into the motor-boat.

As if they were a couple of rabbits, the Maxes crawled through the grass and as soon as they were well out of sight of the water they ran with all their might to the house.

"Jinks, I hope Hamilton didn't go," Maxwell said as they reached their own door, but the colored man had gone, and the four little Ingrams were just trooping gaily downstairs, clamoring for breakfast, although it was only half-past five.

"You children grab a glass of milk quick and anything else you can take in your hands and eat it as fast as you can," Maxine directed and with wide-eyed amazement they did as they were told.

"Listen, old fellows. While Maxine and I were out looking for birds, we passed the old boat-house and it was full of men. They are coming around here by way of the Sound to make us tell about those jewels. Bobbie, you remember that hole we found yesterday up under the wharf? Take my rubber poncho and some of our big sweaters so you will be dry and warm, and you and Carrol crawl in there and don't make a sound until we call you. Keep your heads back of the planks so no one will see you. Take some of these crackers with you and a bottle of milk. Come, I'll watch until you get in safely."

Quickly the three gathered up what they wanted and ran to the wharf, where Robert and Carrol crawled under. They spread the rubber poncho on the rocks and, wrapped in the sweaters, finished their meal. Maxwell saw that the tide was just going out, so he knew his little brother and sister were absolutely safe. He had thought of this hiding place for them while he and Maxine were racing to the house. If the older children had to run for it, the babies would be out of harm's way, he reasoned. There was still no sign of the motor-boat, and Maxwell returned to the house just in time to see Nancy and Francis come out with a white lunch cloth tied at the corners with long stout cords.

"Where are you going?" he asked.

"To hang this for Mr. Pellman to see. We can get through the brush easier than you, Maxes, because we are smaller," Nancy explained.

"Maxine helped us fix the flag," Francis added.

"All right, now listen. Keep out of sight all of the time. Don't put the thing up unless you are sure you are not watched, and if you see anyone you don't know, hide. This is serious, Nancy, and the only thing for us to do is to be awful careful," he warned them.

"We will," they promised. "If we get it up and can't get back, we'll cat call," Francis whispered as the two slipped away.

Inside the house Maxine was busy in the kitchen. "I think we'd better start breakfast and set the table for all of us. If Mr. Pellman sees the flag, he'll come and help us."

"If they come in, let's delay them as long as we can. I mean to keep them here. I've been thinking about the box, Maxes, and if they ask, what do you say to telling them we saw the man take it out of the tree and the other fellow hit him? I don't know what the other fellow looked like, but we can say he's tall, wore ordinary clothes, and went away so quickly we did not see him clearly," Maxwell explained breathlessly.

"All right. I am so glad we discovered them. It would have been awful if they had come here and surprised us."

Then they went on preparing the breakfast, and setting the table. It was all ready, and they took their places, but there was still no sign of visitors.

Nancy and Francis raced swiftly through the woods, the flag rolled in a tight ball under the boy's arm. They did not forget to keep a sharp lookout, but at last they reached the tree. Glancing around to be sure they were not observed the two climbed high up and secured their signal of distress to a stout branch where it fluttered in plain sight of anyone passing along the water. Sliding down quickly they started back,

but had gone only a few yards through the brush when a man came limping toward them.

"What's that thing for?" he demanded roughly.

"We want some friends to come over to lunch," Francis answered promptly, and Nancy kept still. She saw a queer sharp stone at her feet and kicked it loose.

"Look what I've found, Francis," she said quite unconcerned, and picked it up.

"Who are your friends?" the man asked suspiciously.

"Some boys who live in Orient," Francis told him.

"Well, you get up and take that thing down. This is no day to give luncheon parties."

"But they won't come if they don't see it," Nancy declared, "and we are going to have a cake."

As he talked the man had come toward them and Nancy could see that strips of one of his shoes was cut away and underneath she spied white bandaging.

"You take that thing down," the man ordered with a menacing shake of his fist.

Quick as a flash Nancy's arm went up and the sharp stone came down with considerable force on the injured toes. The fellow almost doubled up with pain as the sharp edge struck his exposed foot.

"Run!" Nancy cried and grabbing her brother's hand the two ran as hard as they could go. "He's lame and can't climb that tree, and he can't run, either," she said as they tore through the woods.

When they were sure they were safe they slackened their furious pace and proceeded more cautiously, finally arriving in sight of the house. Nancy slipped forward, leaving Francis hidden in the garden. The small girl managed to get a glimpse through the window and saw the living-room full of men while the Maxes were seated at the table.

"We expect they will be here by eight o'clock," Maxine declared, and one of the men answered sharply:

"Aw, let's get to business."

Nancy crawled back to Francis. "Call to Maxes that we are all right," she whispered.

"All safe," Francis whistled twice.

"Now, let's go down to the beach," Nancy suggested, and down to the wharf they hurried. They saw a sailboat in the distance, and further away, they thought they could make out *The Black Eagle* on her weekly trip to Montauk.

"Let's take off our shoes and get ready to jump into the water if we have to and then yell for all we are worth," Francis suggested.

Off came the shoes and stockings and extra garments. "Ready?" Nancy asked.

"All ready. One, two, three, yell," and yell they did.

"Help! help! help! help!" they screamed at the top of their lungs.

There was a good stiff breeze blowing from the Sound and it carried their voices out over the water.

"Help! help! help! help!" they screamed again.

They paused a moment to see if they got a response, and to catch their breath. "I think that biggest boat is coming toward us," Francis whispered.

"Help! help! help! help! help!" went their cry.

"Will you damned kids shut up?" a voice demanded behind them.

"Help! help!" Nancy yelled again. It was the man who had ordered them to take down the flag and he was running as well as his lameness would permit.

"Help! help! H E L P!" Francis took up the call as the man almost reached them.

"Jump," Nancy ordered and into the water they dived. They came up quite a distance out from the dock and began swimming strongly toward the cliffs, each keeping a watchful eye on the other, until they came to a huge pile of rocks, where they got out of the water and were absolutely hidden from sight of anyone on the land.

"That's *The Black Eagle* and she's coming on like fifty for a dozen," Francis exclaimed excitedly.

In the meantime the Maxes were eating breakfast slowly when they were interrupted by a step on the porch followed immediately by several others and one of the better dressed men stepped unceremoniously into the living-room.

"Good-morning," Maxwell greeted him. "Looking for somebody?"

"The Nelsons are not here this summer," Maxine explained politely.

"They went abroad and probably won't be back before October," Maxwell added. "Anything we can do for you?"

"May we offer you a cup of coffee?" Maxine suggested hospitably.

"No, thanks," the man answered. "I am looking for somebody and I think it is you. Have you been here all summer?"

"Not exactly," Maxwell said slowly. "We came late in June, but we have been here ever since then."

"I suppose you have explored every inch of the Island since you came," the man remarked pleasantly.

Maxine smiled. "The Island is two miles or more long, and nearly that wide. We have not had time to go over every bit of it," she said, "but we expect to before we leave."

"Well, we have not time to quibble over inches. We are of the opinion that you have found something that belongs to us," the man said shortly.

"We have not found anything that does not belong to the Nelsons. May we ask your name?" Maxine said quietly.

"My name's Johns," the man told her.

"What did you lose, Mr. Johns? Mr. Nelson told Father that everything on the Island belonged to the family, the Nelsons," Maxwell insisted.

"Everything on the Island doesn't belong to the Nelsons, young man. I've lost a very valuable bit of personal property and I have an idea that you know something about it. The quicker you tell us the better it will be for you."

Johns was losing his temper.

The Maxes looked at each other. "Have you seen Mr. Johns' property?" Maxwell asked his sister in a grieved tone, as if he expected that she had been keeping something from him.

"No, I have not," she insisted.

"Nor I," said Maxwell.

"There are more than two kids here," one of the men interrupted.

"Where is the rest of your crowd?" Johns demanded.

"Our servant sailed to Orient about an hour ago," Maxwell answered quietly.

"When are they coming back?" the chap who had interrupted wanted to know.

"What did they go for?" another demanded suspiciously.

"To get some fresh corn and we expect the boat will be back by eight o'clock," Maxine replied.

"Aw, let's get to business," one of the men said gruffly.

The other man glanced at his watch. "We haven't time to waste, Johns," he growled, for he seemed to feel very uncomfortable indeed.

Johns stepped close to the table. "I am absolutely convinced that you young ones have stolen my property, and I'll give you exactly one minute to tell us where it is. I mean what I say, young man."

Just then the Maxes heard the catbird call from the garden, but neither one betrayed the fact by so much as a flicker of an eyelash.

"I cannot give you permission to go through the house, because the things in it do not belong to us, but you can search our things if you like," Maxwell offered.

"I'm not going to hang around here while a coupla kids string us," one of the men insisted angrily. "Make 'em tell what they did with the stuff."

"What did you lose?" Maxine inquired evenly.

Johns looked at her for a second, then said, "I lost a box. It is not very big. Not more than six inches long and about three inches deep. Now, what did you do with it?"

"We didn't do anything with it," Maxwell shouted, standing up as he spoke, and looking fearlessly into Johns' face, "but we know that one of your own men found it."

"Which one?" Johns sneered.

Maxwell glanced from one to the other members of the group. There were fifteen men in the living-room, he counted.

"I cannot say that it is one of these men, but I can tell you how he got it, if you'll listen a minute."

"All right, tell us," Johns answered.

"We were out picking berries one day and were near a place the Nelsons call Fireplace Point. It's on the harbor side of the Island. We saw a man coming along with a stick and a field-glass. He wasn't going very fast, but pretty soon he came to one of the biggest trees in that locality. He climbed way up and when he was far enough he stuck his hand in a hollow. He put his arm in way up above his elbow. We could see him and he pulled out a box, I should say about six inches long, and he dropped it into his pocket, then he climbed down and started to run away. Then another man came along the beach, and gave the first one a good hard crack

in the jaw and knocked him down. The second man got the box and went off and in a little while two more men came and picked up the one who was hurt and took him off in a boat. We didn't know any of those men for we never saw them before nor since," Maxwell declared positively.

"Any of our fellows hurt on the beach?" Johns demanded.

"Sure, Andrews was," he was told; but another chap stepped up.

"Say, these kids have probably seen something and made up the rest. If they have seen that much, it's time we got rid of the whole bunch," he said.

"Any coffee left?" said a cheerful voice. "Trust I'm not intruding, Maxes." It was Peter wearing a neat linen suit with his hands jammed in the pockets of his coat. He had come in through the kitchen and now he entered the living-room quite at ease.

"Glad you came," Maxine grinned. "Help yourself to what you want. This is Mr. Johns. The other gentlemen did not introduce themselves."

"They think we stole a box of theirs," Maxwell volunteered.

"Did you?" Peter asked, pouring himself a cup of coffee with one hand.

"How can you ask such a question, Peter?" Maxwell laughed.

"'Tisn't exactly regular. Good-morning, Mr. Johns. Your face is familiar, but not the name."

The men at the back of the room were beginning to edge nervously toward the door and two of them succeeded in slipping through.

"The rest of you might stay here," Peter said quietly, taking the other hand from his pocket. It held a very businesslike little revolver which he pointed straight at them.

Just then the library window opened and Pellman stepped in. "Good of you to gather together like this, McLean. I expected to pick your party up in groups," he remarked, covering McLean with his gun.

Then pandemonium broke loose. There was a wild, fierce struggle but it was over almost as soon as it began, for Pellman's men literally poured into the house from all sides and entrances, and McLean's men were overpowered before they were exactly sure what had happened to them. They stood sullenly huddled and handcuffed, and finally Johns or McLean demanded:

"What is the meaning of this? Who are you anyway?"

"A promoter working in the interest of my Uncle Sam," Pellman told him, cheerfully, then added to his men, "Get 'em out, boys; they take up too much room," and the "boys" promptly

led them away. "I owe you a vote of thanks, Maxes," he said holding out his hand. But the Maxes did not take it, they did not even see it, because there in the doorway stood a man whose appearance brought one great shout from both of them.

"Dad! Dad! How did you get here?" and they ran to his arms, which were pretty well occupied with a very wet little boy and a very wet little girl, also a smaller pair of youngsters wrapped in sweaters, but he managed to make room for his biggest son and daughter and held them tight as he could to his heart and they nestled their heads on his shoulders paying no attention to anyone else. "How did you get here?" Maxwell demanded again.

"In your good friend, *The Black Eagle,*" he told them. "You see," he went on, "I received your letter about Jane, and in the same mail one of the publishers wrote and asked me to come to New York about illustrating a book, so I did not have to tell your mother anything about your letter. Just as fast as I could I got my business fixed up, called at the hospital and saw Jane. She remembered me right away and she'll be well in a month or so, then I got a chap I know to bring me down here in his car. We had a blowout and were on the road almost all night, but we arrived in Orient just in time to join the party of your friend Mr. Pell, or Pellman, who

had commandeered the dear old *Black Eagle* for the trip."

"We decided no one would suspect the boat because she always passes this way at this time every week, and good Captain Dick was kind enough to turn the sloop over to us," Pellman laughed.

"Your distress signal was sighted, so Captain Dick put on steam and sail, and we almost jumped over the water. Then we heard Nancy and Francis yelling for help from the pier, and later they swam out to us. We picked them up with the fish nets and landed in a mass as it were. Mr. Pellman's men surrounded the house. He said Peter was already in it and you know the rest," their father finished.

"We saw Dad, so we ran out," Carrol volunteered.

"Oh," Maxwell said suddenly. "There was a big sailboat on the Sound this morning, Mr. Pellman."

"The revenue men have been aboard her for the past half hour," Pellman told them. "Nancy told us that you overheard the gang at the boat-house, and that's how you were warned."

"Yes, we were bird observing. But how did you know the men were here?"

"Peter sent me a wireless. He has a pet hidden equipment, to which I have the mate in my

room and about four-thirty it began dashing and dotting as if it had the hiccups, and my man at Shelter Island 'phoned that our friends had left the Yacht Club under full sail and steam, so I decided to join them for a round-up."

"As I said before, may I have some coffee?" Peter laughed.

"You did not drink what you have," Maxine reminded him.

"That's so, I didn't," Peter admitted.

Just then Hamilton came hurrying in. "You's all safe?" he cried, glad at sight of his charges.

"Certainly we are, Hamilton. May we all have breakfast?" Maxine asked.

"Su'ly, Miss Maxine, su'ly," Hamilton answered and started off to the kitchen.

"Wait a minute, Hamilton. I want you to meet Dad," Maxwell called.

Dad held out his hand to the colored man. "My children tell me that you are taking splendid care of them, and they look it," he said.

"Dey's a fine pessel of chillen, sah, dey is," Hamilton answered, beaming, then went off to make a real breakfast because everybody was ready for one.

It was a jolly, happy meal and during its progress the children told Dad their experiences, and Pellman explained a lot about the gang that Mr. Ingram did not know.

"When I read that letter I had a feeling there was more going on than it told. I've heard of you, Mr. Pellman, and when the Maxes said you were in Orient, I had a hunch that something serious must be in the wind or you wouldn't be here," Dad told their guest.

"I've told them that I wanted to compliment their Dad and Mother on their training and good common sense," Pellman said with a smile.

"Well, I don't see how they got into so many things," Mr. Ingram said as he looked at the Half Dozen.

"Oh, that's easy, Dad. It's Aunt Phœbe's fault," Carrol remarked.

"How do you make that out?" they all wanted to know.

Carrol's eyes twinkled. "Aunt Phœbe doesn't like Osric or Bargulus," she answered and they all roared with laughter.

"It seems to me this place has done you a great deal of good, little lady," her father told her. "Your cheeks look as if you slept in a rose garden."

"Hamilton says that's where God kissed them," she answered softly and they knew it was quite true.

"I say, I supposed crooks were wonderfully clever chaps. Seems to me this gang is a mighty stupid bunch," Maxwell said contemptuously.

"I'll tell you something, Maxwell. When a

boy or a man starts out to be a crook he becomes a schemer and stops using his real intelligence. He has to live a lie and he tells so many lies that they grow around him, like a net, that finally catches him because, sooner or later, someone will get suspicious, and at least one lie will be checked up and after that the whole fabrication is as plain as day and he gets caught usually by some little foolish thing he has overlooked that any clever man, or even boy, could foresee," Pellman explained.

" ' The fellows with real intelligence are the ones who do the right things,' Mother says," Francis volunteered

" She is absolutely right. Now I must tell you that I have a list of those jewels for you and, as many of their owners have offered liberal rewards for their return, you are entitled to a share of the money. Can't say yet how much it is, but it will be worth having," the Federal Service man told them.

The Half Dozen's eyes turned to Dad. " I expect he is right," Mr. Ingram said.

" Let's vote what we'll do with it," Francis cried gleefully.

" Oh, what's the use? Let's just give it to Mother and Dad, or Dad and Mother," Nancy answered.

" Or Dad for Mother," Maxine interrupted and they all laughed.

Dad grinned. "We won't do anything with it until you get it, but when you do I'm going to vote on this for myself and Mother, and into the bank it goes for the Ingram Half Dozen," he declared, so of course the children agreed with a reservation that Dad and Mother must use it if it was needed. Of course Dad agreed to that, but he had lots of contracts for drawings, jolly, whimsical ones that make people laugh, and he knew everything was well with the Ingrams.

Later, the gentlemen were enjoying their cigars, and the Half Dozen, also the dog and the cat, were resting comfortably on the porch.

"I have decided to take a vacation and spend a few weeks in Orient," Mr. Pellman remarked. "It is a delightful little town. Wish you were going to be here, Mr. Ingram."

"Probably shall. My wife has done so well Dr. Sully told me when I left that I might bring her away any time. I think she would enjoy this place and I know she will feel better with the Half Dozen under her eyes. She has been quite restless without them, so I'm going to call up the hospital, and as some friends are leaving there this evening, they will bring her part way and I can meet her," he answered slowly.

The Half Dozen had been listening with breathless interest to this entirely satisfactory announcement and a great long roar of joy went

up from their several throats. Bargulus helped them and even Osric purred a composition of his own, very musical and pleasing, if anyone heard it.

THE END